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THEOLOGICAL CRITERIA AND HISTORICAL
RECONSTRUCTION: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38-42

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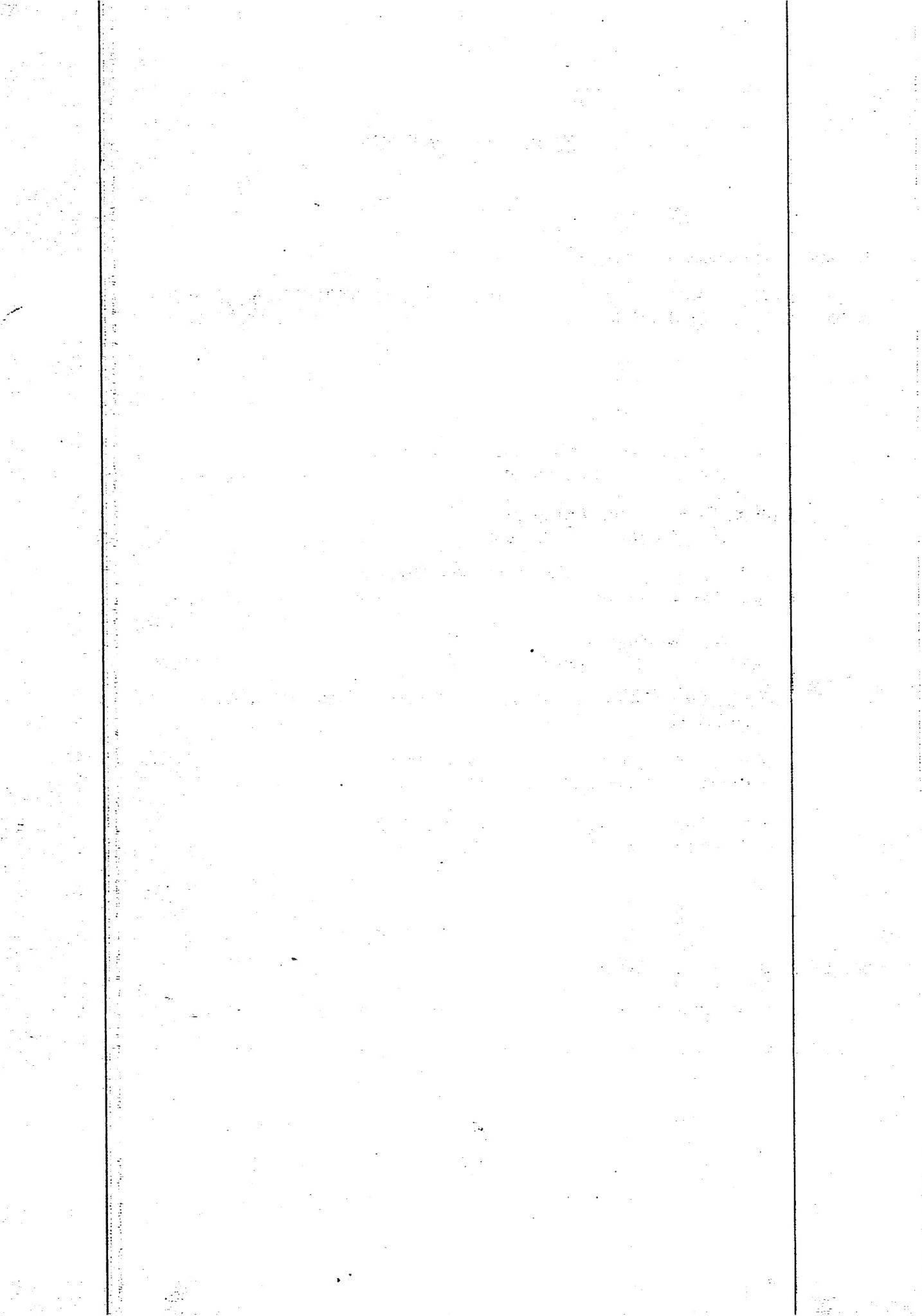
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MINUTES OF THE COLLOQUY



THEOLOGICAL CRITERIA AND HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION:

MARTHA AND MARY: LUKE 10:38-42

Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza

If a fruitful public discourse should occur and understanding take place, theologians, just as other scholars, must critically reflect our own function within academy and church as well as consciously articulate our hermeneutical perspectives and commitments. Following this maxim, I would like to situate my own approach and discussion today within my own discipline, biblical studies, before I begin my analysis and discussion.

The task of biblical studies is construed differently by different groups of its practitioners. While we all would agree on philology, archeology, historical critical as well as literary critical studies, as integral to the discipline, some of us eschew hermeneutical reflection and theological discussion as the task of biblical scholars. What Krister Stendahl has called the "public health" department in biblical studies is still much controversial and underdeveloped, yet a critical hermeneutics and theology seems essential to biblical interpretation as scriptural interpretation. Insofar as we, as NT scholars who understand ourselves not just as literary critics or historians of the first century but as biblical scholars, focus on the canonical writings of Christian churches, we have implicitly accepted a theological framework for our work. The seemingly clear-cut demarcations between historical critical, literary critical and theological scholarship break down. Rather than to veil the hermeneutical connections of historical critical, literary critical and theological biblical scholarship as the objectivist, free value stance in biblical scholarship does, we must explicitly name and discuss them.

It is not necessary to elaborate here again my own hermeneutical perspective and theological commitment. As I have argued elsewhere a feminist critical theory of liberation begins with the systemically explored experience of women in society and church. Women's experience with the bible is shaped by the fact that the bible was and is used against all women in our struggle for liberation. At the same time, scripture has provided visions and authorization for Christian women to struggle against patriarchal racism, poverty, imperialism and sexism in church and society. A feminist critical interpretation of the bible, therefore, has as its hermeneutical center not the patriarchal church but the ekklesia of women or women-church. It does not place the "authority" of biblical texts above the life and experience of women but asks for a critical feminist theological evaluation and assessment of biblical texts.

Literary critics such as Wayne Booth or Jane Donovan have argued that we must interpret and evaluate a classic work of art in terms of justice. What does the language of a text or the dynamics of story do to the reader who submits to its "world of vision?" Such a responsible ethical and political criticism does more than evaluate the ideas or propositions of a work; it seeks to determine whether the language and composition of a work portrays persons

stereotypically and thus unjustly. Whenever one cannot accept the ethics of a text, one cannot accept its aesthetics. Let me restate this theologically: whenever one cannot accept the religious, political, and personal ethics of a text, one cannot accept its theological claims.

A feminist critical interpretation of NT texts, therefore, can not leave their theological exploration and assessment to systematic theology or theological ethics. In the process of critical interpretation, it has to test out, rather, how much these texts hinder or support women in our struggle to end societal and ecclesiastical patriarchy. It must ask whether they religiously socialize women and men into an androcentric mindset and patriarchal behavior and how they function to legitimize or to criticize androcentric-patriarchal language and institutions. A feminist critical theology has, therefore, to articulate not only theological criteria but also an analytical framework for such a process of feminist biblical interpretation.

If a feminist critical interpretation takes as its point of departure women's experience in our struggle to end societal and religious patriarchy then it has to develop a model of biblical interpretation that can explore and assess the oppressive as well as liberative dynamics of biblical texts and their function in the contemporary struggle of women for liberation. In my own work, I have used as basic analytical categories for such a critical feminist interpretation: androcentrism and patriarchy on the one hand, and women's and oppressed peoples' struggle to undo and overcome them on the other hand. Such categories are not inappropriate for NT analysis since without doubt the dominant linguistic, societal, cultural, and religious structures of the NT world are androcentric and patriarchal.

Such a critical understanding of the task of biblical scholarship asks for a multidimensional model of interpretation that can do justice to the dialectics of women's experience with the bible and biblical scholarship. Key elements or moments in such a critical hermeneutical model, I have suggested,

- (1) a hermeneutics of suspicion rather than acceptance. It places on all texts the label: "Caution! Could be dangerous to your health and survival";
- (2) a hermeneutics of critical remembrance and historical reconstruction that traces the struggles of our foremothers;
- (3) a hermeneutics of proclamation that formulates theological criteria for critically assessing the theological claims of NT texts; and, last but not least,
- (4) a hermeneutics of actualization and ritualization that enters the biblical story of struggle with the help of historical imagination, artistic representation and liturgical celebration.

These four elements or aspects of such a model for a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation can be distinguished theoretically but they interact with each other in the actual process of interpretation.

In the following I would like to explore a short NT text, the "Martha and Mary Story" in Luke 10:38-42, in terms of such a feminist critical model of interpretation. In doing so I will focus on a hermeneutics of suspicion and reconstruction in order to raise the issue of theological criteria - a problem much discussed in systematic theology. The story about Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 reads in the RSV translation:

Now as they went on their way, he entered a village; and a woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching (ton logon autou). But Martha was distracted with much serving (diakonia); and she went to him and said: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve (diakonein) alone? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious (merimnas) and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."

This story is found only in Luke's gospel where it is part of the so-called Lucan travel narrative. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (9:51). Chapter 10 begins with the commissioning of the 72 disciples. They are told to expect food and shelter and to eat and drink what is set before them (10:7). The vignette of Martha and Mary is sandwiched between the example story of the Good Samaritan (10:25-37) and the teaching of the Lord's Prayer (11:1-4). While the story of the Good Samaritan addresses the question of "Who is my neighbor?", the section on the Lord's prayer answers the disciples' request to teach them how to pray. The Martha and Mary story, in turn, climaxes in the assertion that Mary has chosen "the good portion."

The interpretation of the passage is most difficult because of the textual problems in verse 41f., the climax of the story. The six textual variations represent basically two different readings:

- (1) the longer reading fits into a meal setting: "Martha you are anxious and troubled about many things; few things are needful or one." This could mean, as one commentator puts it: "A couple of olives or even one will suffice at present. Mary has the main course already" (Danker, Jesus and the New Age, p. 133).
- (2) the shorter reading which has the support of papyrus 45 and is preferred by most contemporary interpreters reads: "Martha you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful." The "one thing" probably refers to the activities of the two protagonists.

The climactic word of Jesus then asserts that Mary has chosen the one thing, the good part. Since the text does not directly refer to a meal or specifically to "serving at table" but has the more general expression "diakonia, diakonein" the shorter reading seems more fitting.

The same two women are also mentioned in John 11:1-44 and 12:1-11. In distinction to the fourth gospel, Luke does not mention the name of the town Bethany nor the brother of the two sisters, Lazarus. We can no longer know

with certainty whether this is due to redactional considerations or whether Luke did not have the same information about the two sisters as the fourth evangelist had. What seems to be clear is that the Lucan account is not interested in the two women as individuals but as representing two competing types or roles of discipleship: diakonia and "listening to the word." Bultmann, therefore, classifies it form critically as a biographical apophthegm that was composed as an ideal scene in order to illustrate the final word of Jesus.

(How does a feminist critical interpretation approach the text? Feminist theology begins with experience. Many women greatly identify with Martha's plight. Traditionally, women have been told that our feminine vocation is to take care of men. Women do all the work in the house and in the kitchen, clean and shop, give dinner parties for the advancement of their husbands, and, at the same time, are supposed to be relaxed, entertaining, and well-groomed. In the church, they wash the altar linen, run the bingo, and hold bake sales, and they do all of this often without ever receiving a "thank you." Many women, therefore, identify with Martha who openly complains. They resent Jesus who seems to be ungrateful and unfair in taking Mary's side. But they repress this resentment and vent it against other women who, like Mary, have abandoned the traditional feminine role. The right-wing backlash in society and church feeds on this resentment.

Other women feel guilty because they are not able to fulfill Martha's role of perfect housekeeper and entertaining hostess. One of my students says of her mother:

I watched my own mother neglect the housekeeping in order to talk to someone or listen or read, and I joined my father in feeling embarrassed about the untidy house. I was ashamed about the mess and always surprised when my friends wanted to come home with me. Some have later explained that my mother made them feel welcome and important and they liked the fact that housekeeping wasn't the first priority... Yet within her own family and within herself this was a conflicted issue. I am sure my mother shared this conflict with Martha.

Although this passage is usually hailed as one of the most positive NT texts on women, an exploration of women's experience with the Martha and Mary story calls for a hermeneutics of suspicion. Such a hermeneutics seeks to explore the liberating or oppressive functions of biblical interpretations, as well as of biblical texts, by identifying their androcentric patriarchal character and dynamics. We, therefore, cannot start with the assumption that the Martha and Mary story is a feminist liberating text, even though its central characters are women.

No consensus is found among interpreters as to what basic meaning the story seeks to convey. A critical review of divergent interpretations can distinguish two basic approaches that highlight in different ways the dualistic character of the text. The abstractionist interpretation reduces the two sisters to theological principles and types. It is supported by the form critical classification of the text as a biographical apophthegm which is an ideal scene or construct for the climactic saying of Jesus. Martha and Mary

then represent, for example, justification by works and justification by faith, Judaism and Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, or people who are preoccupied with worldly cares and those who listen to God's word and seek for spiritual things. Traditionally, Martha and Mary symbolized this world and the world to come (Augustine), or the active and the contemplative life in this world (Origen). The contemporary version of this traditional interpretation emphasizes the importance of love of God over and against social activism that stresses the importance of love of neighbor. Such interpretations not only dehistoricize the narrative but also make women historically invisible. They obscure the androcentric dynamics of the text that uses women to make its point.

Those interpretations which acknowledge that two women are the protagonists of the story work with the good woman/bad woman polarization. Three approaches can be distinguished:

(1) The traditional Catholic interpretation gives women the choice of two lifestyles in the church: active (Martha) and contemplative (Mary). There are those women who serve God and those women who serve men. Active women do the housework, rear the children or take care of the sick, and concern themselves with mundane business. Contemplative women do not allow worldly things to interfere with their quiet study, prayer, and service to the Lord. Women are either laywomen or nunwomen, secular or religious, serving their husbands or serving the Lord.

(2) Protestant interpreters have a more difficult time with the story since the Reformation replaced the role of nuns with that of the "pastor's wife." Women have to fulfill their duties as housewives and hostesses of church suppers, but they should take some time out to "listen, to pray and to learn." Martha is told that only "a few things" are needed. She is still to be the hostess; only she has to keep it simple so that she also can fulfill her religious obligations. To quote the most recent "scholarly" book on Women in the Ministry of Jesus which appeared in 1984 in a distinguished NT Series, Jesus's

remarks, however, are neither an attempt to devalue Martha's efforts at hospitality, nor an attempt to attack a woman's traditional role; rather Jesus defends Mary's right to learn from Him and says that is the crucial thing for those who wish to serve Him. Jesus makes clear that for women as well as men, one's primary task is to be a disciple; only in that context can one be a proper hostess (Witherington, p. 101).

(3) Apologetic feminist interpretations, in turn, focus on Mary's rejection of the traditional housewife role and stress her option for theology. They celebrate Jesus's vindication of her in the role of a rabbinic disciple without carefully analyzing the androcentric implications of Luke's story. Like a student or disciple of a Rabbi, Mary is seated at Jesus's feet. Just as Paul was the pharisaic student of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), so Mary is a disciple of Jesus dedicated to listening to his word. The conclusion is that, unlike any Jewish Rabbi, Jesus accepts women as disciples studying the Torah but he rejects the

role of housewife as women's proper role.

Overlooking the fact that Martha and Mary were Jewish women, this apologetic feminist interpretation understands Christian women's role over and against that of Jewish women. It assumes that Jewish women were relegated to the kitchen and excluded from the study of the Torah. This feminist apologetic interpretation has not invented such an anti-Jewish explanation, but has uncritically taken it over from malestream exegesis. It does so in order to show that Christianity is not anti-women but has liberated women. A feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation must, however, reject such an anti-Jewish interpretation since it seeks to eliminate the oppression and marginality of Christian women by perpetuating that of Jewish women.

Another feminist apologetic way to "save the story" is the attempt to psychologize and eroticize it. The competition between Martha and Mary is then understood either as sibling rivalry or as sexual jealousy. Martha, the older of the two sisters, expects Mary, the younger, to take over her share of the work. Or, since John 11:5 states that Jesus "loved Mary and her sister," it is asked what sort of love this was. In *Jesus According to A Woman*, Rachel Conrad Wahlberg speculates:

Could there indeed have been sexual jealousy between the sisters for the attention of Jesus? Or was it platonic, a friendly relationship? As lively, physical human beings we cannot discount the possibility that there was more than friendly interaction between the three, a factor which could have entered into the resentment Martha expresses (p. 79).

Such a psychologizing of the story not only overlooks the insight of historical critical exegesis that the NT texts are not interested in the psychological attitudes of their protagonists, but it also continues the cultural patriarchal stereotype which can understand women only in relationship to men.

In summary, a hermeneutics of suspicion highlights the fact that the interpretations of Luke 10:38-42 in one way or another underline the dualistic antagonism between the two women or between the timeless principles or life styles the women symbolize. We must, therefore, ask whether such androcentric dualism is a projection of traditional and contemporary interpretations or whether it is generated by the text itself.

A critical literary analysis can highlight the androcentric dynamics of the story itself. The three characters of the story are Martha, her sister Mary and the "Kyrios," the Lord. The relationship of Martha and the Lord is, in the beginning of the story, that of "equals": Martha welcomes "the Lord" into her house. The relationship of Mary to the Lord is that of "subordination." She seats herself at his feet. Martha is absorbed in the preoccupation of diakonia, Mary gives her whole attention to the "word of the Lord."

This opposition already hints at a conflict. Martha becomes the

protagonist of this conflict. Martha does not speak to Mary directly, but she appeals to Jesus as a little girl might run to her parents to tell on a sibling who misbehaves. She complains to the Lord about her sister and asks him to use his authority to tell Mary to share in the work. But the Lord rejects Martha's appeal and sides with Mary. He approves of Mary's choice to listen to him, but discredits Martha's choice of diakonia which is not the "one thing necessary."

The story places "the Lord" in the center of the action. Insofar as the Lord is characterized in masculine terms, the story is clearly androcentric, i.e., male centered. Moreover, Mary who receives positive approval is the silent woman, whereas Martha who argues for her interest is silenced. It is usually overlooked that Mary's discipleship includes listening only, but not proclamation. Finally, the text is not descriptive of an actual situation, but it is prescriptive. It appeals to the Kyrios and pits sister against sister in order to teach a lesson and make a point. But what is the point Luke wanted to make in his own social ecclesial situation?

A hermeneutics of remembrance seeks to move beyond the androcentric text to the life and struggles of women in early churches. It seeks to reconstruct early Christian history as the history of men and women, as memory and heritage for women-church. Rather than to take the androcentric text at face value, it seeks to uncover its patriarchal or liberating function in its historical situation. When discussing the role of women in early Christianity, exegetes usually affirm that women have a prominent place in the Lucan double-work. However, they generally situate Luke's stories about women in the life of the historical Jesus, rather than in the situation of the early Christian communities to whom Luke writes. That Luke 10:38-42 is situated in the life of the early church, rather than in the life of Jesus, is linguistically signaled by the title "Kyrios." The text appeals not to the authority of the historical Jesus, but to that of the resurrected Lord. It is, therefore, important to explore the inscribed historical situation and rhetorical function of the story in order to identify the theological pastoral interests of the author.

Several exegetes have pointed out that the inscribed historical situation is that of the early Christian missionary movement that gathered in house churches. As the owner of the house, Martha welcomes the Kyrios into her house. The text does not say that Martha is in the kitchen preparing and serving a meal, but that she is preoccupied with "diakonia and diakonein," terms that in Luke's time had already become technical terms for ecclesial leadership. Travelling missionaries and house churches were central to the early Christian mission which depended on special mobility and hospitality. According to Pauline literature, women were travelling missionaries and leaders of house churches. The house church provided space for the preaching of the word as well as for eucharistic meal celebrations.

However, exegetes project our contemporary bias on to the early Christian movement; when they conclude that the diakonia of women consisted in practical services to travelling missionaries or housework for communal gatherings and that it was restricted to the house, they, thereby, imply that the patriarchal division between private and public sphere, between women's and men's ecclesial spheres, was already established in Luke's time. They overlook the fact that in the house church, domestic and public ecclesial spheres were one and the

same.

In early Christian usage, diakonia can refer to eucharistic table service in the house church, but it is not restricted to it since it also includes the proclamation of the word. This comes to the fore in Acts 6:1-6, despite Luke's redactional interests to the contrary. The "seven" Hellenists are appointed to devote themselves to the diakonia at table while the twelve dedicate themselves to the preaching of the word. Nevertheless, the seven become the initiators of the Christian missionary movement and are depicted as powerful preachers and founders of communities. They are characterized similarly to the rival missionaries, preachers and apostles of Paul in Corinth.

The structural affinity of Acts 6:1-6 and Luke 10:38-42 has generally been recognized. Just as Martha complains that Mary leaves (*katalipein*) the *diakonein* to her in order to listen to the word (*ton logon*) of the *Kyrios*, so the twelve apostles maintain that they cannot leave (*katalipein*) the word (*ton logon*) of God in order to *diakonein* at tables. Luke not only divides the *diakonia* of the word from that at tables and assigns each to different groups, but also subordinates one to the other in Acts 6:1-6. Luke's redactional interest is remarkably similar to that of the Pastoral epistles which also distinguish between ministers who labor "in preaching and teaching" (1 Tim. 5:17) and those who "serve" (1 Tim. 3:8ff.). Similarly, in Luke 10:38-42, Luke stresses that the "*diakonein*" of Martha is not the "one thing needful" and needs to be subordinated to the "listening to the word." However, the "good portion" chosen by Mary is listening to the preaching of the word, but not the *diakonia*. This corresponds to Luke's picture of the role of women in Acts. Acts tells us that women as well as men listen to the Christian message and become disciples. Yet Acts does not narrate one example of a woman preaching the word or as a leader of a house church. However, Luke seems to know of such leadership activities since he takes pains to emphasize that Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos "aside" in order to instruct him more accurately in the Way of God (Acts 18:26f.). Luke thereby indicates that he knows of the missionary fame of Priscilla, but he avoids picturing her as missionary and preacher.

While the Pastorals explicitly prohibit women from teaching men, the Lucan work fails to tell us stories about women preachers, missionaries, prophets, and founders of house churches. While the Pastorals silence our speech, Acts deforms our historical consciousness and imagination. In addition, Luke plays down the ministry of those women leaders of the early church whom he has to mention because they were known to his audience. Martha and Mary are two of them.

That Martha and Mary were well known figures of the Jesus movement can be seen from the fourth gospel. Martha, Mary and Lazarus are characterized as Jesus's friends whom he loved (John 11:5). They are his true disciples and he is their teacher. After expressing her faith in Jesus's word, Martha goes and calls Mary (John 11:28), just as Andrew and Philip called Peter and Nathaniel. According to the fourth evangelist, Jesus's public ministry climaxes in the revelation that he is the resurrection and the life (11:1-54). While in the original miracle source, the resurrection of Lazarus probably was the heart of the story, in the gospel the center of the story is the Christological confession and dialogue of Martha and Jesus. As a "beloved disciple," Martha

becomes the spokeswoman for the messianic faith of the community. Her confession parallels that of Peter (John 6:66-71), but is a Christological confession in the fuller Johannine sense: Jesus is the revealer who has come down from heaven. Martha's confession has the full sense of the Petrine confession at Caesarea Philippi in the Synoptics, especially in Matthew 16:15-19. Thus Martha represents the full apostolic faith of the Johannine community just as Peter does for the Matthean community.

While Martha of Bethany is responsible for the articulation of the community's Christological faith, Mary of Bethany exemplifies the right praxis of discipleship. She is explicitly characterized as the "beloved disciple" whom the teacher has specifically called. She had many followers among her own people who came to believe in Jesus (John 11:45). Although in the narrative of John 11 Mary plays a subordinate role to Martha, in 12:1-8 she is the center of the action. That Martha "served at table" could be an allusion to Luke 10:40, but in John 11 and 12, she is characterized as fulfilling both the ministry of the word and of the table. Moreover, in John the two sisters are not seen in competition with each other or played out against each other as in Luke. Mary is not portrayed as the opposite of Martha but as a counterpart to Judas. The centrality of Judas both in the anointing and in the foot washing scene emphasizes the evangelist's intention to portray the true female disciple, Mary of Bethany, as the alternative to the unfaithful male disciple, Judas, who was one of the twelve. Whereas according to Mark 14:4, "some" and according to Matthew 26:8 "the disciples" object to the waste of precious oil, in John it is Judas who objects. The male objection to Mary's ministry is discredited and rejected by the harsh rebuke of Jesus: "Let her alone." Mary not only prepares Jesus for his hour of "glory" but also anticipates Jesus's command to wash the feet of each other as a sign for the agape praxis of true discipleship in the discipleship community of friends.

In conclusion, a hermeneutics of remembrance can show that both Luke's as well as John's gospel reflect the struggle of early Christian women against patriarchal restrictions of women's leadership and ministry at the turn of the first century. The fourth gospel indicates how women might have appealed to the leadership of women in the Jesus movement in order to legitimize their own ministry and authority.

Luke 10:38-42 pits the apostolic women of the Jesus movement against each other and appeals to a revelatory word of the resurrected One in order to restrict women's ministry and authority. Its rhetorical interests are to silence women leaders of house churches who, like Martha, might have protested and, at the same time, to extoll the "silent" and subordinate behavior of Mary. Such a reconstruction of women's struggles in the early church also shows why many women today can identify more with Martha than with Mary. It confirms women's "suspicion" that in the Lucan account, Martha received a "raw deal."

The critical exploration of the literary dynamics of Luke 10:38-42 has shown that the androcentric tendencies of traditional and contemporary interpretations are not completely read into the text but that they are granted by the text. Even a feminist interpretation that is interested in reclaiming the text for women, perpetuates the androcentric dualism and patriarchal tendencies inherent in the original story. Since women and men have

internalized the androcentric dualism and patriarchal functions of this text as the word of God, we have to explore critically its contemporary oppressive functions and implications. Not only a hermeneutics of suspicion but also a hermeneutics of remembrance enables us to do so, since the androcentric character and patriarchal interest of Luke 10:38-42 can also be elaborated in a historical reconstruction. A comparison with the fourth gospel's depiction of Martha and Mary helps us to understand the Lucan story's function as prescriptive rhetoric in the historical situation of women's struggle against the gradual partiaclization of the church at the turn of the first century.

Such a hermeneutical exploration of the Martha and Mary story in terms of a critical feminist theology of liberation raises the problem of scriptural authority and theological criteria. A critical assessment of this text highlights the fact that the New Testament not only contains texts with diverse and conflicting theologies, it also contains texts that have served to internalize androcentric dualism and to perpetuate patriarchal roles. A critical feminist hermeneutics, therefore, must challenge the traditional scripture principle that postulates the identity of the divine Word with that of the words of men in scripture. The hermeneutical exploration of conflicting and even oppressive NT texts in their historical contexts has brought with it a crisis of biblical authority and of theological criteria. A feminist critical interpretation does not originate this crisis but deepens it.

Contemporary NT and systematic theology has sought to deal with this crisis of the traditional "scripture principle" in various ways. One dominant approach to the problem maintains scriptural authority while denying the authority of individual texts by postulating a canon within a canon, a material principle or textual center as the essential and controlling element and norm in the NT. Such a canon within the canon becomes, then, the authoritative key for the interpretation of the New Testament writings and the norm for their theological evaluation. This approach of a canon within the canon looks for theological criteria and norms within the scriptures themselves and claims that it can derive from scripture what this canon within the canon should be. Some of the major suggestions for a canon within the canon are:

(1) The Historical Jesus. The historical Jesus has been the norm proposed by nineteenth century liberal theology and today by Latin American liberation theologians. The historical Jesus represented the highest consciousness of God (Schleiermacher) or proclaimed God's reign as a moral kingdom of love and justice (Ritschl), or the historical Jesus was on the side of the poor and the oppressed (Sobrino). From different perspectives, Edward Schillebeeckx and Hans Kueng also appeal to the historical Jesus and his proclamation as the normative center. My historical and feminist critical exploration of the Martha and Mary story has, however, indicated that a distillation of the historical Jesus from the story is neither possible nor desirable, since it would veil the androcentric and patriarchal functions of the text.

(2) Earliest Apostolic Witness. Schubert Ogden, following Willi Marxsen, appeals to the earliest apostolic witness as the criterion that provides the norm for the theological evaluation of NT texts. Some have interpreted my feminist theological reconstruction of Christian origins in

In Memory of Her along these lines. I am, therefore, often accused of producing a feminist variation of the myth of innocent early Christian beginnings as a normative criterion. However, my reconstruction of the Martha and Mary story should have illustrated that this is not the case. I do not argue that the earliest apostolic witness, either that of the Jesus movement or that of the pre-Pauline missionary movement, provided the norm and the criterion according to which the witness of the later New Testament writings would be judged. My reconstruction of the historical context of the Martha and Mary story does not appeal to the Johannine texts as more prior or as the earliest apostolic witness and therefore the norm by which the later texts should be judged. Instead I have pointed to two texts within two of the later writings of the New Testament in order to trace women's struggle in early Christianity.

(3) A Theological Principle or Essence. Some have appealed to the prophetic principle or tradition as the canon within the canon. This appeal to the prophetic tradition was perhaps elaborated most strongly within neo-orthodoxy. Neo-orthodoxy, as one of the most powerful theological movements, reacted against the liberal emphasis upon religion as the highest human cultural expression. With its critique of religiosity, it provided an ample critique of the development of institutional structures within the later writings of the New Testament. Its understanding of the church as an "eschatological" community or as an "exodus" community represented a contrast image to the concrete historical church.

When I speak of the ekklesia of women as the hermeneutical center for feminist critical interpretation, then, I do not appeal to an ideal, pristine form of NT church over and against the patriarchal institutional church, but I seek to make linguistically audible or visible the fact that women are and always have been church, and that wherever and whenever we act communally as ecclesial subjects, church, as discipleship community of equals, becomes tangible reality within and despite the dominant patriarchal structures.

Justification by faith functions in the same way for NT interpreters as the prophetic principle does. Bultmann makes use of justification by faith as the theological criterion over against any objectification of the Christian kerygma through myth. Justification by faith, therefore, provides the theological criterion for his program of demythologization. Another way to articulate a "canon within a canon" would be the distinction between the theological essence of biblical texts and their time- and culture-bound articulations.

Yet such a reduction of the Martha and Mary story to a theological principle, theological essence or ethical norm, does not only reduce the two biblical women to abstract principle and norm as the form critical analysis indicates, it also claims that these theological principles are given by the text or by the Lord. It hides the responsibility of the theological interpreter for the articulations of these principles or essences. A theological method which then seeks to establish a critical correlation between such a "canon within the canon" - however formulated - and our contemporary depth experience of feminist and liberation principles even further obfuscates

its own social situatedness and dependency on contemporary frameworks.

Because of the importance of specific feminist analyses and critical theological evaluations, I have argued that a feminist critical interpretation ought not to reduce the richness of biblical texts and traditions to one particular text, tradition, or principle as the neo-orthodox canon within the canon model suggests. It also should not separate form and content and then formulize and universalize them to a principle or a dynamic as the method of critical correlation or critical confrontation does. Although Tillich had criticized Barth's dialectical method, his method of correlation is still motivated by the apologetic intent that engages in a critical dialogue of "yes and no" between contemporary culture and biblical religion in order to end with an affirmative yes to biblical religion. A feminist method of correlation adopts the same distinction insofar as it separates the socio-critical prophetic messianic principle or dynamics in the bible from its concrete historical articulations and deformations in order to relate it to a highly formalized feminist critical principle.

Rather than to reduce the historical pluriformity and richness of the bible to abstract principle, timeless norm, or ontological immutable type to be repeated and translated from generation to generation, a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation reclaims the whole bible as the legacy and heritage of women-church. Having such a notion of the bible, not as a mythic androcentric archetype but as a structuring prototype, is to understand it as an open ended paradigm that sets experience in motion and makes transformation possible. Such experiences generated by the biblical root model can be oppressive or liberative, not just because of unfaithful or false interpretations and receptions, but also because biblical texts and writings themselves are not just androcentric but are formulated to maintain patriarchal social or ecclesial structures.

While the traditional scripture principle rests on the identity of divine and androcentric Word, the understanding of Christian scripture as formative root model generates ecclesial historical identity and experience. The theological criteria that allow us to test out how much biblical texts and symbols which perpetuate patriarchy might be informed by biblical ecclesial experience today. However, they are not derived from the bible but from the theological analysis of women's experience in our contemporary struggles to end patriarchal oppression.

It is from this struggle that we gain the perspective with which we can read the New Testament writings and discriminate among its diverse theological tendencies. Instead of appealing to some a priori past historical norm, it becomes necessary to recast our understanding of the task of biblical scholarship. While tradition, redaction, and literary criticism analyze the theological dynamics and aims of a story, author, or text, biblical interpretation must also move to a critical theological evaluation of its own interpretations as well as of the original texts in terms of their rhetorical functions in contemporary situations. Historical and literary critical interpretations need to be accompanied by disciplined and publicly reasoned out, theological critical evaluation in order to become biblical critical interpretation.

RESPONSE by Steven Knapp, Assistant Professor of English
 University of California, Berkeley

RECONSTRUCTION AND VALUE

The first time I opened In Memory of Her, I was struck by Professor Fiorenza's clarity and uncompromising rigor; equally struck by the eloquence with which she revealed the powerful images of early Christian women - disciples, prophets, missionaries - who had been veiled and silenced by the New Testament redactors. These qualities reappear in her present contribution, which once again displays her skill in juxtaposing disparate episodes (here Luke 10:38-42, John 11 and 12, and various moments in Acts) in ways that force each passage to yield its hidden social memories. I find the results both fascinating and moving, and I hope that nothing I go on to say will suggest any lessening of this, my primary response to Professor Fiorenza's paper.

I am not a New Testament scholar but a literary critic who is also, as it happens, a participant in what journalists call "the Christian left." Consequently, my response will leave exegetical issues to those more competent to address them and will focus instead on two of what I take to be the broader hermeneutical questions raised by Professor Fiorenza's interpretive and evaluative assumptions.

My first question concerns what seems to me the strongest hermeneutical claim in the essay: the claim that our sense of a text's aesthetic value or theological authority depends (or should depend) on our acceptance of its ethics. According to Fiorenza, "Whenever one cannot accept the ethics of a text, one cannot accept its aesthetics. ...whenever one cannot accept the religious, political, and personal ethics of a text, one cannot accept its theological claims" (p. 2). I have no wish to challenge this assumption - certainly not if to challenge it would mean to argue instead for some formalist view of literary value as independent of interest and belief, or for some neo-orthodox view of revealed truth as operating autonomously within, behind, or even in spite of the actual texts produced by biblical writers. My question is not whether it might be possible to suspend one's ethical commitments while assessing a text's literary or theological value; clearly this is not possible. The question raised by Fiorenza's way of stating the problem is why, given her assumption, we should expect to find acceptable the aesthetics or theological claims of any text produced at any sizable ethical distance from ourselves - that is, at any significant cultural or historical remove from the beliefs and practices of late twentieth-century European and North American academics. I may be unusual, but I can't be alone, in feeling that there is not a single major literary work produced before this century whose representation of social relations could be said to match my own (no doubt inadequate) notion of justice.

No task, in fact, comes more easily or naturally to a literary critic raised in my generation than producing what Fiorenza calls "a responsible ethical and political criticism" of a canonical literary work, i.e., determining whether it "portrays persons stereotypically and thus unjustly" (p. 2). What makes this task easy is not our own ethical sensitivity but the fact

that an enormous academic industry has devoted much of its energy, in the last two decades, to demolishing the illusion that disparate eras of literary history were united by a vast tradition of generous humanism. The point of one kind of literary critical essay used to be to prove that the values of a quasi-religious liberal humanism were matched and confirmed by one or another of Shakespeare's plays. Today such an essay would more likely argue that what looked like liberalism was really a function of some highly specific political strategy in the service of monarchic absolutism. The Victorian novel, formerly seen as an instrument for refining moral discernment and reducing prejudices, now turns out to be a means of enforcing an imaginative identification of female independence with acquisitive narcissism, to mention only one of numerous ideological functions.

My aim in recounting this development in my own profession is not to get Professor Fiorenza to back away from her assumption that ethical and other kinds of evaluation are inseparable. But it seems pertinent to ask, once again, what effect that assumption is likely to have on the prospects of finding value of any kind (except, perhaps, the value of satisfying historical curiosity) in that vast majority of earlier texts whose ethics a reader can no longer hope to accept.

There is, of course, more than one way to answer this question, which is by no means intended as a rhetorical one. Someone might argue that the ethical systems embodied in classic texts are sufficiently complex to save those texts from wholesale rejection by a critic who finds some of their premises repulsive. It might be possible, for instance, to admire the intensity and precision of George Eliot's moral scrutiny of her characters even if one were repelled by her promotion of female self-abnegation and other equally reactionary values. Similarly, a reader who was persuaded by Fiorenza's exposé of Luke's patriarchal strategies might nevertheless want to endorse Luke's critique of potentially idolatrous anxiety ("you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful"). But I take it that any such attempt to sort out the congenial from the reprehensible elements in older texts would simply reproduce the quest for a "canon within the canon," a quest Fiorenza amply describes and sharply repudiates.

If total acceptance and partial recovery are both ruled out, why not just say that the proper aim of criticism is strictly destructive or iconoclastic? That its only point (apart, once again, from sheer historical curiosity) is to liberate us from the rhetorical effects of ancient images that derive a spurious prestige from their alleged theological content or aesthetic value? Criticism of canonical texts would thus amount, in the words of feminist critic Christine Froula, to "a kind of collective psychoanalysis, transforming 'bogey' that hide invisible power into investments both visible and alterable."¹

This iconoclastic model of criticism seems adequate, however, only to one side of Professor Fiorenza's project. The other side emerges most clearly toward the end of her present essay, when she writes that "a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation reclaims the whole bible as the legacy and heritage of women-church" (p. 13; my emphasis). She conceives the Bible "not as a mythic androcentric archetype..." but as a "formative root model" - as a

historical ecclesial prototype that "provides women-church with the sense of its ongoing historical identity and presence of the Spirit among us." This proposal brings me to my second question (really inseparable from the first): in what sense is it plausible - once its traditional interpretations have been supplanted by a feminist reconstruction as far reaching as the one Fiorenza proposes - in what sense is it plausible to suppose that this reconstructed text can still provide a sense of anyone's "ongoing historical identity"?

The answer cannot lie, it seems to me, in the notion that the Bible remains a "historical ecclesial prototype."² What is prototypical about the Bible, as Fiorenza analyzes it, seems to be the fact that it provides an early example of a persistent tendency of patriarchal writers to distort women's religious experience and to conceal women's powerful role in religious history. In other words, the struggle reflected in the Bible is analogous to women's struggle in other periods of patriarchal history, including ours. But it is not clear why its analogous relation to present struggles should give the Bible any special relevance to those struggles - any more relevance than documents produced by numerous other periods and cultures.

The Bible is not, however, merely a prototype in Fiorenza's view; it is also causally related to present struggles. Its causal influence takes two forms. First, contemporary liberationists can discern the (extremely remote) origins of their own work in the Bible's distorted record of earlier struggles. But since those distant origins remained all but invisible during the many centuries in which the Bible served to unify Western culture, it's hard to see how their rediscovery now provides a sense of continuous identity. The Bible's roles as a record of social realities and as a source of historical identity seem not just separate but mutually opposed.

Second, and closer to the main argument of Fiorenza's essay, the Bible influences the present by providing stories and images that are used as rhetorical weapons on both sides of the present struggles themselves. Perhaps this rhetorical function, and not historical priority as such, is what Fiorenza means when she affirms the Bible's value as a "formative root model." In that case the point of a feminist hermeneutics might be, on the one hand, to attack reactionary uses of biblical images in contemporary cultural and ecclesial life and, on the other hand, to add new or corrected biblical images to the liberationist arsenal.

The trouble with this way of understanding Fiorenza's proposal is that the rhetorical efficacy of the biblical images depends on a belief in the Bible's theological authority, which Fiorenza denies from the start. Unlike the feminists she criticizes, briefly here and more elaborately in In Memory of Her,³ Fiorenza is precisely not concerned to preserve a core of theologically authoritative passages or principles (once again, she rejects any "canon within the canon"). And the remarks at the end of her paper suggest that even the social memories she reconstructs, though theologically significant, are not to be endowed with theological authority, since such authority can only derive from the present - specifically, from "the theological analysis of women's experience in our contemporary struggles to end patriarchal oppression (p. 14)."

The claim that theological authority, if there is such a thing, can only have its basis in the present seems to me incontestable. Not even overtly patriarchal theologians ever really derived theological authority from the past. On the contrary, they assumed that the God who demanded their obedience in the present was the same God who had expressed his intentions in the Bible, and that he had not, in the meantime, changed his mind. No theologian has ever genuinely appealed to what Fiorenza calls "some *a priori* past historical norm," unless that theologian believed or pretended to believe that such a norm was backed by the present authority of God. The choice between present and past sources of authority is thus an empty one. What is not empty is the choice between experience and the Bible, since that choice means deciding where one will look for signs of what, if anything, God is presently doing and requiring. If the Bible no longer seems the right place to look for signs of divine intentions, then the first half of the feminist project - criticizing reactionary uses of biblical images - still makes sense. But the positive value of perpetuating biblical images, however reconstructed, seems unclear. It would seem far safer to find one's own rhetorical resources somewhere else.

Finally, I wish to avoid giving the impression that I am concealing my own position in order to lay a rhetorical trap. The fact is that today, as I write this, I can see no easy way to resolve the dilemma that Professor Fiorenza's paper seems to pose. I am inclined to think that the prospects of deriving positive benefit from biblical or, more generally, literary study are rather bleak. Even one's faith in the negative benefit - the benefit, that is, of demystification - may depend on an exaggerated sense of the extent to which classic texts continue to influence people's lives. In the long run, however, one might be forced to revise this assessment and to opt for some version of a "canon within the canon," if only because the cost of the alternative may prove unbearably great.

NOTES

1. Christine Froula, "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," Critical Inquiry, 9 (December 1983), p. 344.
2. For a fuller account of Fiorenza's notion of the Bible as historical prototype, see her In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins (New York: Crossroads, 1984), pp. 33-34.
3. Fiorenza, In Memory of Her, pp. 14-21.

RESPONSE by William S. Anderson, Professor of Classics
University of California, Berkeley

I think that most people, male and female, would respond favorably to the goals which Dr. Fiorenza pursues with her feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation. Women still are not allowed by some men, by other women, and by the oppressive weight of tradition (including traditional Biblical interpretation), to assume their rightful roles in the Church. It is, I suppose, predictable that the process of correcting this unhappy situation will itself be unhappy, divisive, and filled with unfair claims and counterclaims. Still, it would be hoped that scholarly hermeneutics could manage to keep its methodology creditable: it will not help, I think, to argue from bias toward bias. The principles of hermeneutics which Dr. Fiorenza outlines on p. 2 seem to me to be intrinsically questionable, and, as she applies them to Luke 10:38-42, they produce more error than correction, considerably more heat than light. I am fascinated by her provocative way of putting details together, and we should all be grateful to her for stimulating what will undoubtedly be animated discussion and disagreement. Still, we might try for a better set of hermeneutic principles.

Fundamental to all hermeneutics is intelligent criticism, careful questioning of a writer's methods and motives, of the language used in a work, of the audience for which it was written and the way it was and is received. We are trained not to accept blindly what an ancient writer has written, and even less what subsequent critics have claimed that ancient writer meant. However, approaching a work critically is not the same as approaching it with suspicion, which Fiorenza demands. Suspicion implies that the writer regularly gives reasons for doubting what she/he writes; that we come to any particular portion of the text prepared by earlier critical examination to expect problems. Perhaps that is what Fiorenza herself believes, but her paper does not demonstrate that Luke is elsewhere unreliable on feminist issues; and what her suspicions lead her to read as redactionist prejudice by Luke against the struggle of her foremothers seems to me to deserve a more critical and objective interpretation. Suspicion as a preconception can result, as I think it does here, in finding exactly what one wants. What Fiorenza wants more than anything, it appears, is to confirm "women's suspicion that in the Lucan account Martha received a 'raw deal'" (p. 10). She believes that Luke has contrasted Mary and Martha, as we all do (though in different ways). She sees that Luke uses the final comments of Jesus to rebuke Martha and praise Mary. But she apparently thinks that it is an accident, an artistic and ethical mistake on the part of Luke, that people instinctively respond with considerable sympathy for Martha. Prepared as she is to suspect Luke, she plunges in at this point and skillfully and tendentiously argues that this artistic and ethical problem is Luke's; whereas I would claim that it is her suspicious misreading and her biased desire to justify naive responses deliberately and most artistically triggered by Luke that make her problem.

I would claim that Luke was not contrasting two women so much as two attitudes, and I know that I and other men, now and in the past, have sympathized with Martha in their initial response to the story. I admire the art with which Luke elicits that response, for it is calculated to make us hear

and ponder all the more carefully Jesus' rebuke of Martha. Luke did that again in the Parable of the Prodigal Son where he also has two contrasting siblings and a father-figure (who represents God). When the prodigal returns and is warmly welcomed, his brother comes in from a day's work in the fields and protests resentfully over the special celebration of the wastrel's arrival. Here, though the story focuses on two sons, I am sure that it is not just men who respond to the situation and sympathize considerably with the disgruntled elder brother. But the father gently rebukes him and insists that his joy over the repentant sinner was valid. A few weeks ago, I heard a sermon by a neophyte seminarian who naively and passionately argued that the older brother was right. I don't know what his hang-up was, and he could not cite a tradition of men's struggle in the early church, but he was clearly trying to confirm his feeling that in the Lukan account the older brother received a "raw deal." The ease with which we reject the seminarian's interpretation of the Lukan parable should, I hope, invite us to question seriously the way Fiorenza applies her hermeneutical principles to this Lukan story of 10:38-42.

On p. 5, she briefly sets up what she calls the "abstractionist interpretation" of some readers, only to knock it over contemptuously because it "not only dehistoricize(s) the narrative but also make(s) women historically invisible." Elsewhere on p. 9, she condemns Luke for failing to tell us stories about women preachers, and playing down the ministry of women leaders of the early church, of whom Mary and Martha are claimed to be two. This hermeneutic of suspicion seems to depend rather heavily on the argument from silence, deployed in a number of ingenious and sometimes self-contradictory ways, while it rejects some fairly evident methodology required by the shape and art of Luke's narrative. Fiorenza concludes that all traditional interpretations underline what she calls the "androcentric dualism" between the principles that Mary and Martha symbolize (p. 7). That term "androcentric" begs the whole question: it was part of the suspicion with which Fiorenza started, and it is not demonstrated or, I think, demonstrable in relation to the story. Just because Luke uses two women in relation to Jesus, it is not necessary to conclude that he and his account are androcentric; the distortions that Fiorenza produces are gynocentric, but it would be easy to exchange men for either or both of Luke's characters without damaging his point.

I believe that Fiorenza, like Martha, has become distracted by too much diakonia (busy duties) and missed the message. It is plain that Luke is not contrasting two kinds of Christian service, because, as she admits, Mary is doing no service whatsoever. On the other hand, Luke does not force us even to believe that Martha is symbolically performing Christian service with her diakonia. This is not a matter of diakonia, as I read the story. The major contrast, as the Lord's comments reveal in verses 41-42, is between much and one, many things that are unnecessary and one thing that is necessary. Luke artfully and carefully re-phrases his earlier description of Martha - "she was distracted by much service" (peri pollen diakonian) as he has Jesus mildly criticize her for "fretting and fussing about many things" (peri polla). The preposition and adjective are the same; Jesus's negative verbs replace the ambiguous word which Fiorenza has over-interpreted. (In other words, the long comparison with Acts 6:1 ff., which does compare Christian diakonia is not strictly relevant here, and is used most tendentiously against Luke and his so-called redactional interest (p. 9).) Nor are we to focus myopically and

suspiciously on Martha being silenced and the admirably silent Mary. Who says that Mary was silent, that Martha was silenced? Fiorenza does, not Luke, and that surely is not his concern. Otherwise, every time Jesus in Luke silences a man's foolish question or protest, are we to imagine that he is gynocentric? That is the natural strategy of the Biblical narrative about Jesus as teacher: it has no gender relevance. Nor is Luke saying or thinking anything about the struggle of the foresisters, and he should not be faulted for not doing so here, where it is irrelevant. The contrast is precisely what Luke has Jesus articulate: fussing over many things vs. attending to the single necessary thing.

If we use Luke more responsibly, then we can turn to Chapter 12 and find this story explicated in his version of the material which Matthew concentrates earlier along with the Sermon on the Mount. At 12:12 a man appeals to Jesus to help him against his brother in securing his right to family property. Jesus rebukes him with a long sermon. The theme of his remarks, which emerge in 22 ff., is that people should not fuss over the needs of their body, food and clothes, but concentrate on the essential single need of the soul, namely, the kingdom of God. The key verb for fussing (merimnan) occurs in both passages, as does the prepositional phrase that refers to essential things; in both, Jesus refers to true needs with the same word (noun or verb); and I maintain that the antithesis is the same, genderless, irrelevant to the historical women's struggle.

A fair reading of Luke, hermeneutically responsible, would, I hope, start by seeing what he seems to have tried to say in this story. If it does give grounds for suspicion, then that suspicion should be checked out suspiciously. Does Luke speak "androcentrically" about women elsewhere? Does he ignore women's achievements which, on the basis of other reliable sources, we know occurred? As I read Luke's Gospel and Acts, I do not find Fiorenza's suspicions substantiated. At just about every place he and Paul stopped in Greece, Luke reports the active and warm reception of both men and women; and he singles out Lydia of Thyatira for her hospitality (Acts 16:14 ff.). As for the unfair way Fiorenza reports what Luke does with Priscilla on p. 9, I can only attribute it to the unsound way she applies her hermeneutics of suspicion. Priscilla and her husband Aquila are an undivided pair in Luke's account, who encounter Paul at the beginning of Acts 18 in Corinth, welcome him into their home and share their work with him, and then together accompany him back toward Syria. At Ephesus, both hear the somewhat faulty preaching of Apollos and both together take him aside and teach him more clearly about Jesus. What more can Fiorenza legitimately demand? Can she really claim that she is performing legitimate "remembrance" or "reconstruction" of accurate history when she asserts that "Luke thereby indicates that he knows of the missionary fame of Priscilla, but he avoids picturing her as missionary and preacher?"

I hope that someone else will suggest that Fiorenza has also forced the material of John 11 and 12 to fit her prejudices. I would like to conclude by returning to my query about the methodological validity and reliability of a hermeneutics of suspicion, particularly as it is employed here. Biblical scholars can perform a variety of valid service (diakonia). I am troubled about the divisiveness and tendentiousness of a hermeneutics that operates from gynocentric suspicion and feels compelled to brand large tracts of the NT as

androcentric. That seems to me to be like Martha's (or anybody's, male or female) diakonia: it is fussing about the inessential, fussing, in this case, quite inaccurately. The goal is not division, to confirm one's feelings against patriarchy, but rather what Paul called the diakonia tes katallages, the "service of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19).

RESPONSE by Averil Cameron, *Professor of Ancient History*
King's College, London

As I understand it, one of the purposes of Professor Fiorenza's paper is to persuade us that we all employ a particular hermeneutic, even when we think we are being "objective," and that we ought all to come out into the open about what it is. She then demonstrates her own position (feminist-liberationism) through a reading of the story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42, showing that apparently objective attempts to extract from this story information about Jesus's attitude to women, or the meaning assignable to the characters of Martha and Mary, tend to be inadequate precisely because they rely on unadmitted presuppositions. The Bible cannot be used without interpretation, and the basis of that interpretation needs to be brought out into the open and admitted.

The implications of complete acceptance of this call are very far-reaching indeed: the Bible itself becomes an "open-ended paradigm," of which any part is available for a new reading; it will no longer be possible simply to rely on previously established characterizations of certain books or certain themes when interpreting an individual passage, since those interpretations are open to the criticism of being based on hidden critical agendas which may be themselves in need of deconstruction.

I found Professor Fiorenza's reading of this passage both interesting and convincing. Both Martha and Mary are indeed silenced, and it is hard to see that the one is actually much preferred over the other, since Mary's part, too, is only to sit and listen. The common picture of "Jesus the feminist,"¹ supporting in Mary an apparent deviation from the standard behavior of women, is here undermined. But since I am not a biblical scholar but an ancient historian by profession, I should like here to address myself to the wider implications of Fiorenza's paper, especially in relation to my own experience of ancient history as practiced in Great Britain today.

Her opening clearly relates to a controversy within biblical scholarship, and particularly among feminist scholars, which itself relates to a wider contemporary discussion on the subject of the status of history and history-writing. It is now quite commonly stated, in fact, that all history, in that it necessarily involves a filtering process through the consciousness of the historian, and must furthermore be cast somehow in written form, is inevitably subjective.² Even supposedly "hard" data - the evidence of inscriptions, archeological finds, material remains and so on - can still only yield historically interesting conclusions if they are selected and interpreted by a historian. The same limitation determines our very choice of period and subject to study. In my own field, some ancient historians have tried to evade this difficulty of subjectivity by openly admitting it: they would deny that any truly objective, "factual" reconstruction is possible, and claim only to provide an "analytic description" which will succeed, if at all, only by being more persuasive than the alternatives so far proposed.³ Another way that has been tried, notably in early imperial Roman history by Keith Hopkins,⁴ is to divide up one's work into "hard" and "soft" categories, the former consisting of those questions which are susceptible of sociological argument based on

statistical data (the ancient historian's equivalent to quantitative history), the latter embracing everything else, but said to be treatable only by what Hopkins calls evocative description, a patchwork of bits of "evidence" from the sources which will convince the reader to the extent that it has been put together well by the historians. It is notable that Hopkins cites Peter Brown as the prime exponent of this sort of impressionistic method, and implicitly ascribes his success to his brilliant writing;⁵ yet Peter Brown too has conspicuously tried to apply anthropological and sociological methods in his work.⁶ Either way, the old style of narrative, diachronic history is to be totally eschewed, together with the idea that the historian can reconstruct the reasons for events and the motivation of the main actors from careful scrutiny of the texts.⁷

These relativist or subjectivist views of history are often related, at least in Britain, to the use of anthropological methods, and in particular to the awareness that anthropologists have been alert for far longer than historians to the impossibility of value-free reporting. Those historians interested in religion seem particularly conscious of the need to define carefully the scope of their inquiry and indeed the meaning attached to "religion" itself before even beginning - and here, too, they build on a foundation laid by anthropologists used to studying religion in non-Christian societies as part of the cultural system in a given society.⁸ I should site especially the treatment of the Roman imperial cult by S. R. L. Price,⁹ which, by its careful definition of both subject and procedure has successfully shown that it is no longer acceptable simply to impose our own interpretative criteria (supposedly "objective" though they may be) on ancient institutions. All these writers, I think, besides being aware of their own preconceptions, are conscious that even the "hardest" kind of ancient history depends on data which often have to be drawn from just those literary sources that need the most careful interpreting, for unlike the modern, or even the later medieval historian, we rarely have objective records from which to work.

To these perceptions of the problematic nature both of the historical evidence and/or the process of history-writing, which now seem to me to be quite widespread,¹⁰ is added the recent emphasis on history itself as another form of rhetoric, which we associate particularly with Hayden White.¹¹ According to that view, when we write history, we cannot be said to be recording "facts," but only writing in a certain way and with a certain voice in order to persuade. To which it may be answered that whereas we may certainly be shown to be unconvincing in that our persuasion may not be good enough, we may also be shown to be quite simply wrong, by the discovery of a new hard evidence of one sort or another (a new inscription, say). All of these debates make the recent work of Michel Foucault highly relevant, in that here and in his earlier works Foucault has stimulated so high an awareness of the power of discourse, including historical discourse, as being itself a factor in history to be neglected only at great cost.¹²

Yet after all most of us, having realized some if not all of these problems, go on trying to write history, and still believing that in some kind of way or other history does relate to what actually happened in the past.¹³ Not all history is interpretation; a good deal of history is still reporting, and in practice some of that reporting, if not all, is value-free. I am

prepared to believe, for instance, that certain events really did happen at specified times in the past even if I am not able to prove that they happened. If that sounds philosophically inadequate, it is a situation which practicing historians - even good ones - have to live with.

So I feel that a good many historians are indeed already aware of their own critical assumptions, and trying to be as rigorous as possible in their methods. The model of "historical critical scholarship" from which Professor Fiorenza is reacting is already one about which, in my field, consciousness has been raised. Despite many similarities, however, there is surely a great difference between the approach of scholars within the theological tradition and that of historians with no confessional allegiance to their subject matter. I addressed this point to some extent in my first Sather lecture this semester called "The Two Rhetorics," in which one of the pairs of rhetorics considered was that of theologians and that of historians. Thus many theologians writing on the early church, a subject equally appropriate for general historians, do so from the standpoint of explicit personal engagement; this is certainly true of most (all?) feminist theologians, and it is true of Professor Fiorenza's paper here, where she refers not only to women's contemporary struggle but also to the conception of "women-church." Recovering or vindicating the Bible as the source for interpreting the position of women today within Christianity is a vital aim of feminist biblical scholarship.¹⁴

And this is where as a historian I myself, despite being a woman, begin to feel uncomfortable. The current awareness of historical presuppositions lends itself very well to the approach of feminist analysis. But it is one thing to be aware of the limitations of one's own activity in trying to reconstruct "history," and another to come with a specific engagement and use it to interpret the evidence. Even Paul Ricoeur seems to feel the dilemma: "I hesitated," he says in the introduction to a collection of his essays, "to include the essay on 'Christianity and the Meaning of History' because it goes much further than the others... towards a profession of faith and thereby breaks a certain modesty which to me seems essential to philosophical dialogue."¹⁵ There is a great difference between admitting one's own preconceptions and actively imposing one's own concern in the reading of the texts. For surely most historians (though, of course, I know there are the exceptions) would sincerely reject the idea that they were doing this in their own work.

Thus the feminist hermeneutic of remembrance worries me more than the hermeneutic of suspicion, to which as an ancient historian trained at Oxford I was brought up from an early age. It does not follow, as far as history is concerned, from the recognition that no interpretation is value-free that we have the right to impose our own judgements and commitments on the material being studied, but only that we must be more careful about what we are doing and how we do it.

Yet what we are writing about makes all the difference. Professor Fiorenza is doing something quite different from what I have just had in mind, in this conscious attempt to seek in the tradition a different kind of answer from those that have usually been found. She would probably also retort that I have obviously been conditioned by androcentric norms of scholarship, and I can

see that there is something in that. There is probably a difference of national patterns operative here as much as any universal problems of gender. Feminism is certainly far less prominent an issue among female academics in Britain than in America, at least in my own experience, and our interest in the history of women is often separable from a committed feminist perspective in a way which may seem treacherous to feminists here.¹⁶ We tend, in common with Continental women scholars, to be more concerned with general theoretical perspectives - anthropological and sociological methods, literary critical approaches, post-structuralism, Marxism - than with feminism as such. No doubt this has much to do with a prevailing culture in which women are still far less visible in leading positions than they are here, despite of course our having both a Queen and a woman Prime Minister. I am myself, for example, so used to being the only woman on major committees, even academic ones, that I hardly notice it anymore; and the passing of an Equal Opportunities Act has seemed to most people to have made very little difference. Because of this situation, I am not normally expected to put the woman's point of view, but rather, if you like, to show that I can be as good as a man. Is it surprising that Professor Fiorenza's paper interests me very much, like her other work, or that (dare I say it) it makes me feel a little uneasy?

NOTES

1. L. Swidler, "Jesus was a Feminist," The Catholic World 212(January 1971), pp. 171-83; Biblical Affirmations of Woman (Philadelphia, 1979).
2. For some comments on this in relation to feminist scholarship, see Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Women and Their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in Adela Yarbo Collins, ed., Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship (Chico, CA, 1985), p. 67. Even the hallowed notion of primary and secondary sources has come under attack, see for example, Paul Veyne, Les grecs ont-ils cru à leur mythes? (Paris, 1983), and note 14, below.
3. So Mary Beard and Michael Crawford, Rome in the Late Republic (London, 1985), p. 4.
4. K. Hopkins and G. Burton, Death and Renewal (Cambridge, 1983); see also K. Hopkins, Conquerors and Slaves (Cambridge, 1978).
5. Death and Renewal, p. 232, n. 29.
6. See especially "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," JRS 61(1971), pp. 80-101; "A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclast Controversy," EHR 88(1973), pp. 1-34.
7. Cicero has especially suffered from this approach: see Mary Beard, "Cicero and Divination: the Formation of a Latin Discourse," JRS 76(1986), forthcoming.
8. C. Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in M. Banton, ed., Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion (London, 1966), pp. 1-46, has been a major influence. Compare, too, the debate on

"irrationality," for example, B. Wilson, ed., Rationality (Oxford, 1977); P. Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society," in D. Z. Phillips, ed., Religion and Understanding (Oxford, 1967), pp. 9-42.

9. S. R. F. Price, Rituals and Power (Cambridge, 1983).
10. For instance, F. G. B. Millar, whose book The Emperor in the Roman World (London, 1977) claimed to let the sources speak for themselves, and which provoked an intemperate attack by Hopkins (JRS 68(1978), pp. 178-86), is now conducting a year-long seminar in Oxford addressing itself to just these problems.
11. Metahistory (Baltimore, 1973) and especially Tropics of Discourse (Baltimore, 1978).
12. For our period, although the promised volume on early Christianity (Les Aveux de la chair) has not appeared, the two volumes on Greece and the early Roman empire are extremely important (L'Usage des plaisirs and Le Souci de soi, both Paris, 1983).
13. See A. Momigliano, "The Rhetoric of History and the History of Rhetoric: On Hayden White's Tropes," Comparative Criticism 3, edited by E. S. Shaffer (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 259-68.
14. See, for example, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "For Feminist Interpretation," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 35(1979/80), p. 13, cited by Brooten (note 2, above), p. 61.
15. P. Ricoeur, History and Truth, English translation (Evanston IL, 1965), p. 7. On the other hand, compare L. Mudge, in P. Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia, 1980), p. 1: "'Beyond the desert of criticism we wish to be called again.' So wrote Paul Ricoeur toward the end of The Symbolism of Evil (1960). This longing is shared today by the many for whom historical-critical method remains indispensable, but at the same time insufficient to bring us to a 'post-critical moment' of openness to the biblical summons."
16. So was the case with Averil Cameron and Amelie Kuhrt, eds., Images of Women in Antiquity (Wayne State University Press, 1983), which arose from a year-long seminar on women organized in the first place by Fergus Millar.

certainly not normative for canonizing the way women are to take their place in continuing Christian tradition.

But the history of turning women into theological principles in the process of interpreting biblical texts sets off two issues which are part of the crisis it is the task of feminist theologians to deepen. The first concerns theological abstraction itself. Not every theological abstraction is inimical to the cause of women's liberation; certainly women interpreted as embodiments of conversion, faith, forthrightness and fidelity model the qualities of discipleship which transcend maleness or femaleness in the disciple. So some theological abstractions are in the service of emphasizing the equality of members in the ekklesia. Are there some theological abstractions sufficiently normative, generated by texts themselves, which counter the disregard in which women's diakonia is held, and the social roles women are assigned in the texts, roles they continue, historically, to be assigned on the basis of such texts? If "such texts must be evaluated historically in terms of their own time and culture and assessed theologically in terms of a feminist scale of values" (In Memory of Her, p. 60), can some theological abstractions function as such a "feminist scale of values"?

The second issue concerns the relation between normativity established by diachronic social-historical analysis, and normativity established by exegesis done from a synchronic, intertextual, literary approach. Implicit in this paper is the assumption that what is more prior than the texts themselves is the historical fact of women's equality, missionary activity, ministry and leadership in the Christian community - women's activity which was within the first generation subordinated to male authority by a "gradual patriarchialization" (p. 11); and that this historical data is normative, providing theologians with a basis for re-interpreting the texts and questioning the history of their interpretation. But the fact of chronological priority cannot, in itself, be theologically normative of subsequent interpretation, as Schuessler Fiorenza maintains on p. 12. The assessment of texts according to a feminist scale of values would seem to require a synchronic, intertextual method.

Such a method would also contextualize the Lucan narrative of Martha and Mary in the whole of Luke's Gospel; it would acknowledge Luke's attention to women and his technique of pairing male and female figures, eg. Zachary and Elizabeth (Lk 1), Simeon and Anna (Lk 2), centurion's servant and widow of Nain's son (Lk 7), man with fig tree and bent-over woman, man planting mustard seed and woman kneading dough (Lk 13) which "equalizes" them according to a theological-content analysis. Luke's theological interests in such a structuring of his overall narrative would need to be in dialogue with the issues both of theological abstraction and of the social subordination of woman which emerge from historical analysis of the same texts. These tensions, then, seem fruitful places to continue the conversation and do the work of deepening the crisis!

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RESPONSE by Eloise Rosenblatt, RSM
 Graduate Theological Union

HERMENEUTICS OF CONVERSION

Two features of Elizabeth's Schueller Fiorenza's paper that I would like to focus on in this response are (1) the relation of feminist exegesis to the Christian tradition, and (2) some of the issues surrounding her identification of theological abstraction as a style of interpretation which has masked the historical reality of women's place in the theo-sociological tradition.

At the outset, I want to affirm one thing which distinguishes Schueller Fiorenza's theological enterprise - her challenge of biblical tradition, yet her determination that the same tradition be re-constructed and re-claimed by women as a "structuring prototype" (p. 13). She acknowledges the sins of the tradition against women. Yet she does not reject the possibility that the same tradition can nevertheless be redeemed, in spite of its patriarchal authority structures and circular argument for male exclusivity justified by appeal to its own long tradition of subordination of women.

Such redemption of the tradition is purchased at a high price, paid by the ekklesia of women (p. 12) who, as disciples in a community of equals (p. 12) work from what I shall call a "hermeneutics of conversion." This means that women name the sins against them in the Christian tradition, that they send out a call that the tradition be converted, all the while in the act of re-establishing a relationship with the tradition in its renewed status. It seems to me that women exercising such a hermeneutics of conversion in the present-day Church re-enact their historical role as preachers, missionaries, leaders of house-churches, and ministers.

Conversion of the human heart is closely linked to the promise of divine forgiveness. Schillebeeckx proposes that the disciples came to believe in Jesus's resurrection out of a sense that they had been forgiven for their failure and disloyalty as his followers (Jesus, pp. 390-397). If this is so, that the experience of being forgiven opens to men the experience of resurrection and capacity to believe in the transcendence of death by Jesus, then Christian feminist theologians find themselves today as before: the first witnesses of the resurrection. They take initiative in proclaiming a message of conversion, forgiveness and re-clamation to the tradition itself. In this way, feminist theologians acknowledge their experience of resurrection - what was the death of women or their mere half-life in the former days of the tradition is now being re-constituted and transformed. Their diakonia of challenging the tradition is at the same time proclamation of its essential message.

As framework for her analysis of the Martha and Mary pericope of Luke 10:38-42, Schueller Fiorenza proposes a feminist critical hermeneutical model that comprises four elements: (1) suspicion about the text rather than acceptance of it, (2) remembrance and reconstruction that traces the struggles of women before us, (3) proclamation that formulates theological criteria for assessing the theological claims made in the tradition about a certain text,

and (4) actualization and ritualization that impacts art and liturgy (pp. 2-3).

Schuessler Fiorenza's description of these four elements can be adapted into a model of four-fold conversion: (1) a turning over the familiar, surface meanings of a text to uncover what is hidden or suppressed about women; (2) a turning back to retrace the steps of interpretation through women's history and re-consider the narrative road not taken by male tellers, the story of women's contribution to the tradition; (3) a turning away from theological positions which claim as support those texts which are oppressive of women; and (4) a turning toward the tradition and the community with a challenge that the tradition be re-told, re-narrated, and an insistent demand that the roles of community members be re-considered and re-structured. Such a conversion is engaged in by the feminist theologian in the process of doing her ministry; and her own conversion is the subject of her call to the community, that it, too, be turned and changed, and its life reformed.

The possibility of forgiveness for the tradition does not require that feminist theologians adopt a particular description of biblical authority or make concessions to reigning theological criteria of interpretation. Nor, as Schuessler-Fiorenza maintains, must feminists assume responsibility for a crisis that already exists between biblical authority and theological criteria. It is not because women have projected their own social discontent onto biblical texts that patriarchy has become both a social and a theological problem. Defining biblical authority, and describing the relation between the words of men and the revelation of God - this is a major crisis for the entire Church, not only feminist theologians. Working toward both conversion and reconciliation between women and the tradition requires a deepening of the hermeneutical crisis that already exists (p. 11).

As part of her own work of calling the community to conversion, Schuessler Fiorenza catalogues some of the "acts against women" enshrined in the canonical Christian writings - silencing the speech of women, playing down their roles, omitting their activities as preachers, missionaries, prophets and founders of house-churches (p. 9). Interpretation of the Lucan Martha-Mary text is one case showing how women's historical and social activity, ministry and authority have all been resisted. Convincing evidence of this resistance and repression can be outlined by a historical review of the interpretation of this pericope. One style of interpreting Mary and Martha - or any women - in such scriptural texts avoids their historical identity and renders their femaleness into a theological principle or abstractions; they "personify" this world vs. the life to come, the active life vs. contemplative life, the love of God vs. love of neighbor, the "good woman" vs. "bad woman" (pp. 5-6). Schuessler Fiorenza notes in the case of Martha and Mary that the Johannine account (Jn 11) is less suppressive than the Lukan of women's modeling of faith and discipleship (p. 10). However, when the texts are exegeted, not within the context of the historical life of Jesus but situated in the life of the early church (p. 8), the androcentric-patriarchal bias is clear. Once Martha and Mary are regarded as real persons, re-historicized, and no longer invisible as female persons, the male interest in subordinating their social and religious roles emerges in the very narration of the Lucan story. Historical reconstruction which discloses the primitive strata of the tradition is not to be identified with a theological norm for interpreting these texts (p. 12) and

certainly not normative for canonizing the way women are to take their place in continuing Christian tradition.

But the history of turning women into theological principles in the process of interpreting biblical texts sets off two issues which are part of the crisis it is the task of feminist theologians to deepen. The first concerns theological abstraction itself. Not every theological abstraction is inimical to the cause of women's liberation; certainly women interpreted as embodiments of conversion, faith, forthrightness and fidelity model the qualities of discipleship which transcend maleness or femaleness in the disciple. So some theological abstractions are in the service of emphasizing the equality of members in the ekklesia. Are there some theological abstractions sufficiently normative, generated by texts themselves, which counter the disregard in which women's diakonia is held, and the social roles women are assigned in the texts, roles they continue, historically, to be assigned on the basis of such texts? If "such texts must be evaluated historically in terms of their own time and culture and assessed theologically in terms of a feminist scale of values" (In Memory of Her, p. 60), can some theological abstractions function as such a "feminist scale of values"?

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**RESPONSE by Mary E. Lyons, Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Homiletics
Franciscan School of Theology**

Dr. Fiorenza's argument for a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation intends, she suggests, "to make linguistically audible or visible that women are and always have been church, and that wherever and whenever we act communally as ecclesial subjects, church, as discipleship community of equals, becomes tangible reality within and despite the dominant patriarchal structures." For many reasons- not the least of which is the irony of my own situation as a Catholic laywoman who prepares others for a pulpit that is officially denied her - I champion her intention. My sympathetic response to this paper derives from the rhetorical or, more specifically, homiletical questions associated with the critical hermeneutical model she presents. Especially relevant here is the third element of that model: a hermeneutics of proclamation.

I take as a significant inclusion in this paper the rhetorical dimension both as a clarifier of, if not corrective to, New Testament and systematic theology as a contributor to the contemporary interpretation of biblical texts. With her emphasis on proclamation, Dr. Fiorenza implies that when we act as church we act rhetorically. In order to explicate this more specifically, I emphasize that the church - through its individual and institutional rhetoric - speaks and acts always with suasive intent. As the most audible expression of ourselves as church, our preaching is a more immediate and, therefore, a more valid index of the community's belief than any correspondingly explicit statements of its biblical or systematic theology. As a church which has been first and always a proclaiming, preaching community, its homiletics is principally responsible for shaping the development of and response to theology.

In another sense homiletics is the realization of hermeneutics. The alliance between rhetoric and philosophy that marked Plato's Phaedrus might find its counterpart today if biblical and rhetorical scholars were to admit their interdependence, to acknowledge the contribution of each other's field of inquiry, and to cooperate in revealing the gospel as an "openended paradigm that sets experience in motion and makes possible transformation." In short, any hermeneutics will wither without the quenching waters of a corresponding homiletics. And as challenging as it must be to tap the sources of a feminist hermeneutics, discovering some underground stream that might yield the historical flotsam of a feminist homiletics is especially unlikely. From my perspective as a rhetorician, however, this is not particularly bad news. To suggest how a rhetorical perspective may cooperate with the hermeneutical in proclaiming the fullness of scripture for the community of all believers, I offer two possibilities: (1) approaching a biblical text with, what I would call, a rhetoric of sympathy, and (2) reclaiming a humanist homiletics.

I. A Rhetoric of Sympathy

In applying a hermeneutics of suspicion to the Lucan account of Martha and Mary, Dr. Fiorenza concludes that the text's interpretations "in one way or another underline the dualistic antagonism between the two women or between the

timeless principles or lifestyles the women symbolize." This model suspects less the text; more, the text's subsequent interpretations. A rhetoric of sympathy, on the other hand, attempts to begin from within the text itself, to consider not only content and context but, especially, how these were and are relational. That is, the very act of sympathetic sharing acknowledges the historical and present relationship of the text with the person or persons with whom it is engaged. If we acknowledge the Word as incarnational and living, then critics pose for themselves a dilemma when they attempt to interpret that Word as if it were a lifeless artifact. Similarly, if we understand ourselves in relation to a living Word, how can we stand suspiciously outside and judge that which necessarily includes and addresses us? Yet, if we approach the text sympathetically, we consider how that Word incarnates an entire community of men and women within, not despite, their historical context. For example, we may never know if, indeed, "the Lucan account is not interested in the two women as individuals," but we can presume that account reveals an aspect of those complex relationships that mark the whole Church then and now. A rhetoric which sympathizes with a text, historical and evolving, names what may be insidious or inspiring without being bound to either. A rhetoric of sympathy leaves the critic within the text free; not to pick and choose what may validate one's sense of justice, but free to respond to a gospel that contains both Luke and John. An analogous idea is illustrated by Margaret Miles in her description of the relationship between image and viewer: "Whether an image is experienced as dangerous or emancipatory will be a function of the interest of the viewer. An image may seduce a viewer to a certain message, but it will not bully him to that message."¹ The application of this rhetoric of sympathy holds out the possibility for revealing more than the authorial interests of a biblical text, but for opening more the full experience and transforming the power of the gospel.

II. Reclaiming Humanist Homiletics

Of particular concern to me is how the dialogue among feminist theologians, biblical scholars, and others will promote a richer and more inclusive gospel proclamation for the church. And because the history of my own discipline teaches that sophistry thrives in arid climates, I look for how the climate of our dialogue might yield a nourishing harvest for the preaching church. A critical interpretation that simply mirrors the gospel reflects back upon itself. While it may reveal something of a text's meaning, such a perspective invites the same criticism it seeks to impose on other models. Such criticism becomes trapped by the need to measure one text (Luke as "prescriptive") against ideals suggested by a text of its own genre (e.g., John as "normative"). In this, the critic becomes party to a circular discussion that begins and ends at the same place: with the texts themselves. Missing in this process is the real correspondence that actually exists among the text, the author, and the hearers. Missing is the movement from hermeneutics to homiletics, from interpretation to proclamation.

An obvious concern, given by Dr. Fiorenza's argument, is how the church's proclamation might justly reveal the past, confront the present, and critique these for the gospel audience, oppressed and oppressors. A homiletics which accounts honestly for the past and the present must embrace and account for the full gospel, the whole church. That is, it must acknowledge controversia as

inherent within the community. How the church might preach from this stance has been suggested to me by Thomas O. Sloane's analysis of humanist rhetoric. The aptness of his insights for contemporary homiletics comes from the following description of Erasmus's humanist (as opposed to formalist) rhetoric, one marked by "controversial thinking" which acknowledges or exploits contraries and by "literary culture" which admits modes of persuasion that do not depend upon reason only:

The instability of language was to be revelled in, not fretted over. That language is plastic was shown in puns and in verbal ironies. But this plasticity, this nominalism, was no more cause for despair that the contraries of living in a fluid and changeable world. The safeguard against intellectual anarchy, the center that holds the varied and variable world of learning together is Christ, particularly the humanity of Christ, vividly embodying as it does the plan of God ...and dramatically serving to fuse such contraries as the divine and the mundane, the sacred and the secular, the Christian and the pagan. Of course, Christ himself in the Erasmian view is actional, sermo not verbum...²

What I term a "humanist homiletic" presupposes a continuing action of Christ, God's word. It encourages a proclamation that celebrates the Incarnation while it admits controversy and skepticism. Through this, the preaching church moves away from dogmatism and progresses toward the truth that sets free all believers. And this, above all, is the intention a rhetoric of sympathy with its corresponding humanist homiletics shares with a feminist critical hermeneutics of liberation.

NOTES

1. Margaret Miles, Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 30.
2. Thomas O. Sloane, Donne, Milton, and the End of Humanist Rhetoric (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 83.

**RESPONSE by Antoinette Wire, Professor of New Testament
San Francisco Theological Seminary**

I was coming out of Stanley Fish's Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities when I read your paper and was struck by the common insight that spans the gap between us. He found it impossible to stand squarely on this side of the text as a reader among readers, tripping on its surprises, without finally admitting that he was writing the text and was happy doing so. He could see that he was doing this not as an individual but as part of an interpretive community whose assumptions, so to speak, swallowed the text and left nothing behind. What was left was the struggle between different interpretive communities, the text's different devourers, for recognition as the authoritative writers of the vanished text. The opponents he is in conversation with seem to be waiting for the fight over the lion's carcass to clear and reveal that the lion ate the man. You may agree with them that the text will outlast this particular literary fray. But in fact you go beyond Fish to combine his bold stand for the interpretive community's priority over the text as the ground of authority with an equally strong commitment to historical reconstruction through texts. Even the more literary and mythological texts are for you access points to previous cultures and once-living people whose struggles are of irreplaceable value in themselves. The question must be whether you can eat your cake and have it too. I think you bring it off by taking the text as the link between two authoritative groups of people, then and now, rather than as an authority in its own right. So it can be both mirror and window if it is not icon. This works, I think, because you claim an interpretive community that has such mass - count us from the beginning - such distinctive character, such grievance and such endurance that the authority of past women and present women cannot finally be played off against each other.

I think we have a long way to go when it comes to accurate historical reconstruction of the early Christian women. The first task is the one which you tackle so clearly here, to break down the stereotypes projected by readers - and already by authors - whenever women become the topic of discussion. This involves bringing the other meanings of diakonia into the stories about women, especially where networks of terms also appearing elsewhere and prescriptive language suggest a polemic against women's active roles. Then, by applying this kind of reading to the many other texts from this period, we need to reconstruct the various social fields as they function for women. What Luke and John do so differently with the Martha and Mary stories is less a difference of personal vision than it is a reflection of social pressures on each. Luke shows the pressures on the minority groups in the cities of the Roman East to conform to sexual roles (D. Balch, Let Wives be Submissive). John shows the pressures on people expelled from religious legitimacy to isolate themselves and effectively claim new channels of authority - Martha, the paraclete, the loved disciple. We need to know how these pressures specifically affect women and how they interact with the other pressures on women in pre-industrial cities and their agrarian hinterlands. Here we must find ways to be open to the very peculiar interests, roles and challenges that women may have experienced which are quite beyond our knowledge. We know so little, yet historians on all sides are beginning at once to ask the important

questions.

And finally we must not exempt the time of Jesus from the same kind of exploration as our way to avoid the fallacy of taking it as the single point of authority. This kind of misuse will give way only when replaced by a new picture. The context here is the Jewish agrarian labor base of the wealth surrounding Greek cities and the distant Roman Empire. What were the pressures here? Does it say something about this world as well as about the later writers that the actions called diakonein in the gospels are attested only for women and slaves in spite of the fact that Jesus apparently takes this verb as a model for his ministry and teaching? Another resource for this social world, in spite of questions of dating, are the Jewish sources. The story of Jesus, Martha and Mary needs to be seen in the context of stories about the women disciples of other rabbis, stories which share in its ambiguities as you have revealed them. For example, from Jacob Neusner's new translation of the Jerusalem Talmud Sotah 1:4:

R. Zabedeh, son-in-law of R. Levi, would tell the following story.

R. Meir would teach a lesson in the synagogue of Hammata every Sabbath night. There was a woman who would come regularly to hear him. One time the lesson lasted longer than usual.

She went home and found that the light had gone out. Her husband said to her, "Where have you been?"

She replied to him, "I was listening to the lesson."

He said to her, "May God do such-and-so and even more, if this woman enters my house before she goes and spits in the face of that sage who gave the lesson."

R. Meir perceived with the help of the Holy Spirit (what had happened) and he pretended to have a pain in his eye. He said, "Any woman who knows how to recite a charm over an eye - let her come and heal mine."

The woman's neighbors said to her, "Lo, your time to go back home has come. Pretend to be a charmer and go and spit in R. Meir's eye."

She came to him. He said to her, "Do you know how to heal a sore eye through making a charm?"

She became frightened and said to him, "No."

He said to her, "Do they not spit into it seven times, and it is good for it?"

After she had spit in his eye, he said to her, "Go and tell your husband that you did it one time."

She said to him, "And lo, I spit seven times!"

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He said to them, "And should the honor owing to Meir be tantamount to the honor owing to Meir's creator? Now if the Holy Name, which is written in a state of sanctification, the Scripture has said is to be blotted out with water so as to bring peace between a man and his wife, should not the honor owing to Meir be dealt with in the same way!"

(The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation, Vol. 27, Sotah, tr. by Jacob Neusner, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 31-32.

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And finally we must not exempt the time of Jesus from the same kind of exploration as our way to avoid the fallacy of taking it as the single point of authority. This kind of misuse will give way only when replaced by a new picture. The context here is the Jewish agrarian labor base of the wealth surrounding Greek cities and the distant Roman Empire. What were the pressures here? Does it say something about this world as well as about the later writers that the actions called diakonein in the gospels are attested only for women and slaves in spite of the fact that Jesus apparently takes this verb as a model for his ministry and teaching? Another resource for this social world, in spite of questions of dating, are the Jewish sources. The story of Jesus, Martha and Mary needs to be seen in the context of stories about the women disciples of other rabbis, stories which share in its ambiguities as you have revealed them. For example, from Jacob Neusner's new translation of the Jerusalem Talmud Sotah 1:4:

R. Zabedeh, son-in-law of R. Levi, would tell the following story.

R. Meir would teach a lesson in the synagogue of Hammata every Sabbath night. There was a woman who would come regularly to hear him. One time the lesson lasted longer than usual.

She went home and found that the light had gone out. Her husband said to her, "Where have you been?"

She replied to him, "I was listening to the lesson."

He said to her, "May God do such-and-so and even more, if this woman enters my house before she goes and spits in the face of that sage who gave the lesson."

R. Meir perceived with the help of the Holy Spirit (what had happened) and he pretended to have a pain in his eye. He said, "Any woman who knows how to recite a charm over an eye - let her come and heal mine."

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RESPONSE by Herman Waetjen, Professor of New Testament
San Francisco Theological Seminary

Since most of the literary texts of the past six thousand years have been androcentric and patriarchal, a feminist hermeneutics is indispensable for the exposure of male domination in all spheres of human existence. Among the feminist theologians who have been engaged in formulating such a hermeneutics, Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza has concentrated on developing "a multidimensional model of interpretation that can do justice to the dialectics of women's experience with the Bible and biblical scholarship."¹ The key elements of her critical model are undeniably valid:

- (1) suspicion rather than acceptance of biblical authority, (2) critical evaluation rather than correlation, (3) interpretation through proclamation, (4) remembrance and historical reconstruction, and (5) interpretation through celebration and ritual.²

Yet this critical model proves to be inadequate when she exegetes Luke 10:38-42. Of the five key elements, she applies a hermeneutics of suspicion and historical reconstruction and reaches the conclusion that this text

...pits the apostolic women of the Jesus movement against each other and appeals to a revelatory word of the resurrected One in order to restrict women's ministry and authority. Its rhetorical interests are to silence women leaders of house churches who, like Martha, might have protested and at the same time to extoll the 'silent' and subordinate behavior of Mary.³

The story of Martha and Mary, however, belongs to a larger narrative world, and it cannot be grasped validly unless it is related to that larger story of which it is a vital part. Narrative criticism or more concretely Reader Response Criticism precedes historical reconstruction and must be included in such an exegetical undertaking.

As Schuessler Fiorenza has observed, Luke 10:38-42 is found in Luke's Travel Narrative (9:51-19:48). What its structure is continues to be an object of intensive discussion and controversy. No one, as yet, appears to have found the key that unlocks the rationale of its arrangement of tradition. Perhaps there is no conscious thematic construction, only rhetorical structures of various types of parallelisms.⁴

The Martha and Mary incident occurs between the parable of the Good Samaritan and the disciples' request to be taught how to pray. The juxtaposition of the parable of the Good Samaritan and the story of Martha and Mary may be determined by the narrator's deliberate effort to link two episodes that mirror Jesus's challenge of the Jewish pollution system. Both Samaritans and women were unclean in the Palestine of Jesus's day. The parable of the Good Samaritan may have been turned into an illustration of Christian discipleship, but it still retains its parabolic character of subverting one aspect of the Jewish pollution system: racism. The Martha and Mary story continues the challenge. Jesus enters into a home of two women and remains

with them; one of them involves herself in the ministry of hospitality; the other prefers to sit at his feet and be his student.

Schuessler Fiorenza is probably correct in her identification of the ecclesial context of this story: in the institution of the house church at the end of the first century the two ministries of service and the word have become separated from each other. The androcentrism which earlier communities of the Christian movement has rejected is returning, and patriarchy is reasserting itself. But I am inclined to the opposite interpretation. While women are indeed being silenced and forced into subordinate roles, the evangelist Luke is attempting to reverse this trend. Mary is not being commended for her passive listening, while Martha is being denigrated for her active diakonia. This is not an episode that conveys the message of 1 Cor. 14:33-36!

In the first place, Mary may be seated at the feet of "Jesus," not at the feet of "the Lord." The weight of the manuscript evidence, in my judgment, supports such a reading, and the substitution of "the Lord" in place of "Jesus," reflecting an intensification of christological identification, would be a natural tendency for scribes in the transmission of the text during the second century. Furthermore, the assumption that she was a passive listener may be invalid. To what extent she engaged Jesus in dialogue and debate is not indicated, but rabbinic tradition reflects lively discussion between teachers and students.

Samaritans can be good, and women can become teachers. Their role is not to be defined by Martha's active diakonia. They are also to be commissioned for the service of the Word, but the prerequisite is a period of study and beyond that empowerment. This episode does not conclude the story which the evangelist is narrating. Certain events must transpire before the disciple Mary, who has been instructed by the rabbi Jesus, can become a teacher in her own right.

At this point in the narrative the actualization of the Rule of God still belongs to Jesus. In 11:20 he will declare, "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then the Rule of God has come upon you." At the Passover, however, when Jesus celebrates the Old Exodus with the drinking of the first cup and the New Exodus with the drinking of the second cup (22:17-20), he hands over God's Rule to his disciples. The meal included "the apostles," most likely both the Twelve and the Seventy who had been sent out to proclaim the Good News and to heal the sick; and although Mary and Martha are not among them, they are represented by the women who at least must have been among the Seventy. Both sisters, therefore, are recipients of this transfer of God's Rule, if not directly, at least indirectly. It belongs to them as much as it belongs to any of the others who have been Jesus's disciples.

The 114th saying of Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas is noteworthy in this respect, and Schuessler Fiorenza, in her book In Memory of Her, is very much aware of its origin in this second century context. The male disciples of Jesus object to the presence of Mary in their circle. Which Mary this is has been a matter of controversy. But in the light of Luke 10:38-42 she is probably to be identified as the sister of Martha. Because she was instructed by Jesus, she is in the company of the Twelve as a full equal. Jesus's

response to the disciples' objection manifests the growing androcentrism of the second century church: "See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Rule of Heaven."

The termination of dependency in 22:35-38 is a concomitant feature of the transmission of God's Rule, and it applies to Mary and Martha as much as it does to any of the others. Moreover, Jesus's dissolution of the relationship of dependency that has existed between himself and his disciples implies the foreclosure of any and every form of dependency in this eschatological reality which his followers share and bear. It is a judgment on all hierarchy and elitism, androcentrism and patriarchy, which might arise in the future. From this moment on the disciples, like Jesus himself, must enter into an identification with the "lawless," that is, with those outside of the law who have no rights, who are disenfranchised, who suffer injustice and oppression.

In Luke, as in the other Synoptics, the women are the first witnesses of the New Exodus. As they enter the tomb of Jesus, they encounter "two men ...in gleaming apparel" who almost certainly are to be identified as Moses and Elijah who appeared to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration and discussed with him the 'Exodus' which he was going to achieve in Jerusalem" (9:31). They witness to the women the actualization of this New Exodus which he has fulfilled. Jesus subsequently appears to them, remains with them for forty days and completes their instruction. An ascension removes him from the sphere of earthly affairs, and, as a result, he becomes a transcendent reality. The Rule of God is now in the hands of his disciples. Their mission will commence as soon as they are empowered with the same Spirit that Jesus had received at his baptism.

On Pentecost the Spirit descends upon the women and men who are assembled in the upper room; and the suprncephalic flame, which appears on each head, establishes their participation in the deification of Jesus and therefore their divine identity. Assuming responsibility for the Rule of God, they launch the Christian movement that begins in Jerusalem and culminates in Rome. Unfortunately, Peter and Paul dominate the second half of this narrative world, the Acts of the Apostles. Peter's role may be due to the historical leadership that he exercised after he experienced the resurrected Jesus and received the commission to reconstitute the community of women and men which Jesus had established.⁵ Paul, the more radical of the two, replaces him in the narrative and serves as the bearer of God's Rule onto the European continent and into the imperial city of Rome. His role may be based on the stature he gained as a result of his mission and letter writing, particularly after his martyrdom. No contemporary appears to have traveled so widely; no one may have penetrated so deeply into the gentile world; no one may have established so many congregations; no one left behind such a legacy of letters. Certainly there were many women evangelists, but the author of this two volume narrative world seems to have knowledge of only one, Priscilla, and she - like others! - worked with her spouse, even though she appears to have been more capable and enjoyed more respect and honor than her husband, Aquila. Whether there were any women evangelists who traveled alone or in the company of other women - it must not be forgotten that Jesus had established the mission pattern by sending them out "two by two" - remains indeterminable.

At the very least the Martha and Mary story reflects the authority which

women enjoyed as leaders of house churches. They were engaged in diakonia, in table service and all that it involved. But they were also proclaimers and teachers of the Word, and in this ministry they were represented and authorized by Mary, who was one of the disciples who sat at Jesus's feet and subsequently, at least by vicarious representation, received the Rule of God, the empowerment of the Spirit and the supracephalic flame.

If this is a valid interpretation of Luke 10:38-42, it is only because it attempts to take into account the larger narrative world into which it has been placed and to follow the plot-line which the author develops in narrating "those things that have been fulfilled."

NOTES

1. Schuessler Fiorenza, "Theological Criteria and Historical Reconstruction: Martha and Mary: Luke 10:38-42," p. 2.
2. Schuessler Fiorenza, "The Will to Choose or Reject: Continuing Our Critical Work," in Feminist Interpretation of the Bible, edited by Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985).
3. Schuessler Fiorenza, "Theological Criteria...," p. 10.
4. See Kenneth Bailey, Poet and Peasant (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).
5. See 1 Cor. 15:5, Luke 24:34, Matt. 16:16-18.

MINUTES OF THE COLLOQUY OF 10 APRIL 1986

List of Participants

Professor at Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge
Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza

Professors at the University of California, Berkeley
William S. Anderson (Classics)
Steven Knapp (English)
Daniel Melia (Rhetoric)

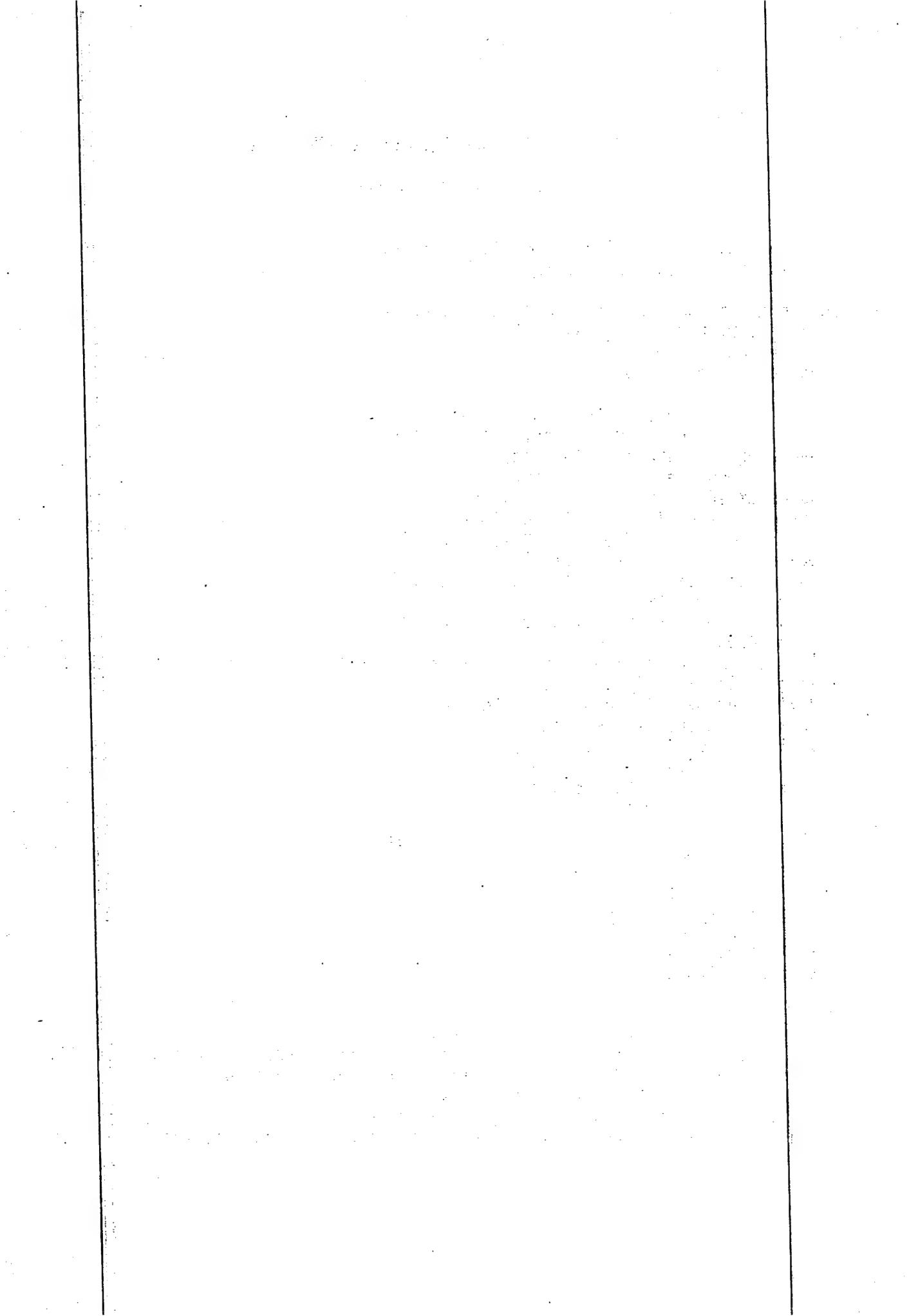
Professors at the Graduate Theological Union
Rosemary Chinnici (Psychology and Religion)
James Duke (Historical Theology)
John R. Donahue (New Testament)
James Empereur (Systematic Theology)
Durwood Foster (Systematic Theology)
William R. Herzog, III (New Testament)
Everett Kalin (New Testament)
Anitra Bingham Kolenkow (Visiting Scholar)
Thomas Leahy (New Testament)
J. Hilary Martin (Phenomenology of Religion)
Steve Reid (Old Testament)
Sandra Schneiders (New Testament, Spirituality)
Andreas Shyman (Visiting Scholar)
David Stagaman (Philosophical Theology)
Herman Waetjen (New Testament)
David Winston (Judaic Studies)
Antoinette Wire (New Testament)
Wilhelm Wuellner (New Testament)

Students

Marilyn Coffey
Robert Maldonado
Eloise Rosenblatt
Nancy Schreck
Donna Stevenson
Evelyn Thibaux
Elizabeth Thomson

Guests

Marvin Brown (University of San Francisco)
Mary Gross (Center for Women and Religion of the Graduate Theological Union)
Otto E. Guttentag (University of California, San Francisco)
Sandra Luft (San Francisco State University)
K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (University of California, Davis)
Sandra Yarlot (Center for Women and Religion of the Graduate Theological Union)



MINUTES OF THE COLLOQUY OF 10 APRIL 1986

The Discussion

Waetjen: This is a singular occasion. We are meeting for the second time in the history of the Center on Thursday evening for a colloquy; but far more significantly, this is the first time in the history of the Center that a woman has initiated the scholarship for our colloquy. I say that to our shame and to Dr. Fiorenza's distinction.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Thanks for having me here. When I accepted the invitation I did not know that I was to be the first women scholar to discuss her work in this colloquy. I had thought that in the past five years we had moved past the stage where I had the "distinction" of being the "first woman." I am very grateful for the careful responses to my paper and especially for the critical questions and challenges which have been raised. However, I am afraid that my remarks will not be able to do justice to the wealth of insight and suggestions. Since I have just arrived this afternoon, I am not only suffering from a three hour time difference, but I am also working with the disadvantage that I received the papers at the time of my arrival and I have, therefore, not had sufficient time to consider carefully the written responses.

My paper was written for a theological discussion and context. It attempts to articulate, on the one hand, that the "canon within the canon" debate is not my major concern, and to show, on the other hand, why I do not think that the standard theological answers to the problem of canonical authority are satisfactory. Thus, the paper was written for a theological context rather than for a general hermeneutical context. This different horizon is probably the reason why some of the respondents may have had difficulties with my text.

In order to discuss the responses, I would like to place them in a general hermeneutical framework. If I recall correctly, it was Ricoeur in his article on political theory and hermeneutics who pointed out that the hermeneutical discussion moves between two poles: the project of the Enlightenment to challenge prejudice and to eliminate it, and that of Romanticism which is concerned with the retrieval of tradition and heritage. The responses seem to vacillate between these two poles, between prejudice and retrieval.

Prof. Knapp does not wish to challenge my contention that whenever one cannot accept the religious, personal and political ethics of a text, one cannot accept its theological claims. He notes that such a statement is quite acceptable within his own discipline, and has been discussed for twenty years. However, I sought to articulate this criterion in terms of biblical studies as theological studies because I do not think that my own discipline has sufficiently discussed a critical evaluative hermeneutics.

Obviously, I do not share Prof. Knapp's convictions that the project of such a critical hermeneutics for liberation is, in the last analysis, doomed to failure because one can deconstruct texts, but nothing positive will be left over on the basis of which a project for liberation could be constructed. He fears that if the deconstructionist project attempts to eliminate the words of

prejudices, we will be left without a heritage and a positive tradition. He correctly points out that in my work I have radically questioned the authority claims of biblical texts and argued that feminists should not replace a patriarchal fundamentalist rhetoric with an apologetic feminist one. However, I do not undertake the deconstructionist project for the sake of deconstruction, but I have argued that we must deconstruct the authority of the androcentric text in order to reclaim the ecclesial authority of women. In my understanding, the bible is not simply a literary or theological prototype, but an ecclesial prototype.

Prof. Anderson, on the other hand, fears that I do injustice to the Lucan text by approaching it with a hermeneutics of suspicion. He accepts an "intelligent criticism" but insists that approaching a work critically is not the same as approaching it with suspicion. He contends that the paper does not show that elsewhere Luke is unreliable on feminist issues. Yet, what would he have said if I had set out to show anachronistically that Luke is reliable on "feminist" issues? My point is that all texts without exception are grammatically androcentric texts that subsume women under the generic "man" and make us, at best, peripheral or occasional. Therefore, a feminist critical reading must always approach the androcentric text with suspicion.

Prof. Cameron is not only aware of the philosophical discussions on the possibility of objective historiography, on so-called value neutral or value free historical research, but especially also on a constructionist historiography and the question of its rhetorics. Nevertheless, she seems to think that I do not distinguish sufficiently between admitting one's own presuppositions and imposing one's concerns. Yet, I do not suggest that one must impose one's own concerns, but I insist that insofar as the reconstruction of history works with reconstructive models, we cannot avoid imposing our interests and concerns by the mere fact of the linguisticality of our so-called data and their re-ordering according to the heuristic or reconstructive categories chosen. It is not merely efficient to recognize one's own presuppositions, but it is simply necessary to articulate, positively, what kind of constructive models one uses, in order to write or reconstruct history.

Moreover, a hermeneutics of suspicion - as I understand it - is not just concerned with recognizing one's own presuppositions. In terms of Segundo's hermeneutical model or in terms of critical theory, such a hermeneutics is also concerned with analyzing and recognizing one's ideological interests and commitments. In other words, it seeks to lay open a scholar's interests and functions, not only within academic but also within societal or ecclesiastical discourse. The problem, again, is that of eliminating prejudice and the possibility of an adequate historical reconstruction, which cannot be solved by the assertion of an objective, value-neutral historiography.

Professors Lyons, Rosenblatt, and Waetjen, on the other hand, are not so much concerned with questions of presuppositions and prejudice, but - as I read them - with the redemption of the tradition, with a rhetorics of sympathy, or with the rehabilitation of the evangelist Luke who according to them is really more feminist than I am prepared to concede. These responses are clearly to be situated at the other pole of the hermeneutical discussion, since they are interested in reclaiming and retrieving the Christian tradition without first

deconstructing it.

I am concerned with such a retrieval of our heritage, too, but I would insist that this can be done only in and through a hermeneutics of suspicion. A rhetoric of sympathy or a hermeneutics of retrieval must be based on a critical evaluative hermeneutics, but must not replace it. Insofar as a critical feminist biblical hermeneutics is interested in reclaiming women's Christian history and theology as well as women's historical struggles against patriarchy in the context of Christian history, it is no longer primarily interested in the apologetic defense of patriarchal traditions or in the rehabilitation of androcentric sacred texts. It focuses, therefore, on the difficulties of writing - as feminist historians have called it - women back into history and theology as well as of claiming history and theology as women's own heritage.

I have not yet mentioned Prof. Wire's response, not only because I know her concerns to be similar to mine, but also because she seems not interested in situating herself at one pole or the other of the hermeneutical spectrum. Instead, she asks the question whether I can "have my cake and eat it," that is, whether I can hold both poles in a creative tension. She answers this question in the affirmative because she recognizes my attempt to hold the two hermeneutical poles - elimination of prejudice and retrieval of heritage - together. Because she accepts this methodological starting point, she can raise very important questions, especially with respect to the social history of early Christianity and its reconstruction. The questions she raises deserve much more careful research and a much wider discussion. We are only beginning to develop this field and we don't know yet what we can or cannot recover in the course of our research.

This brings me to the most crucial point of our discussion; one which Prof. Cameron makes when she refers to her own situation in Britain as a woman in the academy. She suggests that I am raising these hermeneutical and methodological questions because I work in a different social academic context that allows me to participate as a subject in the academic discourse, and to raise women's issues as theoretical issues and does not force me to become a "better man" in intellectual terms. I concur with her observation when I compare the situation in the States with the German university system, which I know better than the British situation.

In the North American context, women scholars can raise these issues and questions, and we can strive for a public discourse on them. This is possible because a broad based women's movement exists, and even though it is declared dead every five months by the New York Times, it nevertheless makes inroads. Moreover, it is possible because there is a critical mass of women students, and also more and more men students in theological schools and universities. They make the crucial difference that enables me to raise such feminist issues in New Testament interpretation. These women committed to changing patriarchal structures challenge me to explore and articulate how women who have been the submerged and the silenced members of the people of God are, and can become, church; how women have been and are, especially today, historical and theological subjects and not just objects of theological discourse.

Waetjen: Any response from those who served as critics?

Lyons: Maybe I could begin with the question that was one of those that framed my own response, and that is the application of the hermeneutics. That is a concern I have as a teacher of preaching. One of the questions I raised had to do with the application of a hermeneutics of suspicion by those who are (given the criteria of this hermeneutical model) considered both critics of the text and its intended audience at the same time. Also, could you expand a bit on what you understand and mean by the hermeneutics of proclamation, how all the elements of this hermeneutical model together, at some point, move toward encompassing (i.e., addressing, considering, embracing) the entire ecclesia of men and women?

Schuessler Fiorenza: I am not quite sure what you mean with the last point, but I can address the first. If you look at what I have written, you will find that I have only slowly come to distinguish between the different elements or strategies for a process of critical interpretation. As you are well aware, biblical studies, and especially the education of future ministers and teachers, follows the historical critical model. I remember, when I started to teach, I was told by one of my senior colleagues that the biblical scholar was not a theologian. His (sic) task as an exegete was to teach, with utmost objectivity and value-neutrality, whatever the text said and whatever the text meant in its historical context. To raise any question of relevancy, of what the text could mean for us today, was taboo, and was really selling out to contemporary concerns. Coming from the German hermeneutical tradition, it was just mind-boggling to me that someone could seriously suggest that I ought to deal only with what the text meant but not also with what the text means today. How could I ever know what the text meant if I didn't know what the text means today?

When I discovered the now almost classic article by K. Stendahl on "Biblical Theology" in the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, I began to understand the rhetoric of my exegetical colleagues who sought to distance themselves from the biblical theology movement which was in danger of dissolving the distance between then and now. In order to distinguish but still hold together the "meant" and "means," I have delineated four interlocking steps in the process of biblical interpretation. One element of this hermeneutical process is conceived of in terms of the contemporary ministry of the church. I have called it - for want of a better word - a hermeneutics of proclamation which seeks to explore how the biblical texts have been, and are, used today by dominant Christianity in order to evaluate them in terms of a theological scale of values. I have begun to explore what such a hermeneutical analysis and theological assessment would involve. But I would want to point out that such an exploration of the uses of biblical texts in the interest of liberation cannot approach the text with a rhetoric of sympathy or a hermeneutics of consent because that would mean to continue the use of Scripture in the interest of dominant patriarchal structures. A feminist hermeneutics of proclamation that is based on a hermeneutics of sympathy with androcentric texts and patriarchal traditions cannot contribute to the abolition of patriarchal oppressions but only to their spiritual internalization and theological legitimization.

Wuellner: In a recent joint publication of a New Testament scholar and a psychologist,¹ the observation was made that the Mary/Martha story in Luke is placed in the - for Luke - significant travel section beginning in 9:51. It is in this "travel section" that Jesus for the first time fully faces the cross. The point was made that Mary's interaction with Jesus was the appropriate one for someone who, for the first time, had an opportunity to express his anguish over having to face a terminal situation. The psychologist was arguing that persons sensitive to the plight of the terminally marked people do not talk in situations like this; instead they listen and open themselves up to what that person has to share. In other words, the exegetical observation of Luke 10 being part of the Lucan travel section is contextually important for understanding the Mary/Martha/Jesus dynamics. Instead of seeing the encounter in only socially contextual ways - a matriarch receiving into her house (patronage/matronage system) a man with a worthy cause - one comes to see the social behavior determined by that specific interaction with someone expressing anguish over something analogous to a terminal illness. What do you say about that way of contextualizing this narrative?

Schuessler Fiorenza: I do not see Jesus expressing such anguish in Luke's text.

Wuellner: He is "on the way" (10:38) and - as in Mark 8:31ff. - now teaching (10:39) in a new context.

Schuessler Fiorenza: If Luke's point was such anguish, he would have had the means to indicate it.

Wuellner: Let's remove the psychologically loaded term, anguish, and look instead at the fact that beginning Luke 10, Jesus no longer teaches in terms of the "sermon on the plain" (Luke 6:20-49), but is now teaching about what it takes to have one's "face set toward Jerusalem" (9:53) that begins with the transfiguration account where Moses and Elijah confirm (9:31) what he first announced in 9:22, namely that his "exodus" is now at hand. It is that which he is now teaching in Luke 10. Wouldn't that make a difference in the man/woman social situation as contextualized by you?

Schuessler Fiorenza: It would if we would learn what Jesus is teaching in the story. I wish Luke had written the story as you read it.

Waetjen: But I'm keeping the story within the entire narrative world to which it belongs.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Right, but how do you know that the story prepares Mary for a future teaching, that she is a student of a rabbi and therefore she has first to listen before she can teach? I wish Luke would have indicated that. I wish Luke would have given us words and narratives of such significant teaching that Jesus revealed to the women there. But that is not the context or structure of the story.

Wuellner: But its placement in Luke 10 at the beginning of the travel section, rather than in Luke 9 before the first passion prediction (9:22) and its (divine) confirmation in 9:30-31, would have some weight, wouldn't it?

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes, but what kind of weight does it have? American colleagues are often telling me that I'm misled by my exegetical Germanic context in reading Luke. They might be right, but what would they say if I would make Luke out as a feminist? I read the overall Lucan work as situated between the Pauline writings and the Pastorals. I do think that Luke understands women to be members of the Christian community. He stresses their membership but plays down their leadership. So the story fits in terms of the notion that women like men are members of the community. But in crucial passages like this, Luke tries to make indirectly clear that women are not in apostolic leadership or in other leadership. Since I read Luke's work in the context of the Pauline work, my reading of the redactional tendencies of Luke compares them with what we know about women's leadership from the Pauline letters.

Wuellner: But, you are using, for my taste, too broad a canvas, namely the canvas of women in Christian leadership, of women's participation in the Christian community in general, whereas I start with the observation that Luke 10, as part of Luke's "travel section," is the location of all of this, and that women are interacting with Jesus at a point where clearly the disciples have no sensibilities, whatsoever, to his plight as he "sets his face to Jerusalem." At this point it is a woman who is interacting with him and not any of the men. Luke here is more like what John does with women as more sensitive to Jesus's mission than even the "appointed" disciples.

Schuessler Fiorenza: But this is not the emphasis of the story.

Wuellner: You are making Mary come up pretty poorly in your analysis of what Luke is doing.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I point out that she is at his feet - which is what the text says. I read the story as an androcentric text but not just in terms of the androcentric dynamics of the text but also in terms of its conceivable historical subtexts. In order to move beyond the androcentric text, I read the literary dynamics of the text in terms of the subtexts and try to place the story in a reconstructed historical context.

Martin: I was just wondering what would happen if you inserted two men, such as Peter and John, in the same situation. You might conceive of John sitting at Jesus's feet, his personality being more passive, while Peter is much more active, more busy. How would that affect, for example, the general sense of the story? The contrast could as easily reflect two kinds of psychological types, couldn't it, that are not necessarily restricted to feminist situations. Masculine personalities are also passive and active. Men could be inserted easily, couldn't they? Or do you feel that this particular text really does say something about feminine character that wouldn't be appropriate for men in the same way?

Schuessler Fiorenza: I do not really work with psychological types. I don't think that was my point in the interpretation of this story. Of course, we could construe many different stories. But one would get a different text if two men were the main actors in the story. If you consider not just my reading of the text but also the subsequent history of its interpretation and effects,

then you find that its effective history underlines my reading of the text as a dualistic text.

In an androcentric perspective and language structure, male and female protagonists function differently. It is important that two women are central in the story - it's not accidental. Just remember, in androcentric language structure which functions as so-called generic or inclusive language, women are always subsumed under men and are invited to identify with men as paradigmatic humans. Otherwise women in the past and today could not have read grammatically masculine texts and made them their own. Androcentric language means "men" and "he" are always central and explicit and it is common sense that such masculine terms include women. In such a language structure, men always know that they are meant, whereas women always have to think twice about whether they are meant or not. Such androcentric language structure implies that if the two protagonists in the story were men, they would be paradigms for being human or Christian. Since, however, women are mentioned here, the characters represent women. One does not find women mentioned explicitly in androcentric texts if the text speaks about the generic human. Today we still say generically "scholar" and "he," or "student" and "he," even when women students or scholars are present. Only in particular cases or when there are problems will androcentric language mention women and render women explicit in the text.

Martin: You're suggesting, then, that this is a story about women, that they are clearly meant, and while men might fit in the active versus passive paradigm for some other reason, it would be handled differently and in another place?

Schuessler Fiorenza: The story is told in order to tell something to women, those who were first hearing or reading it.

Kolenkow: I agree very much with your affirmation of women as leaders, and especially as leaders of house churches. In talking about the hermeneutics of suspicion, one thing one knows about gospels is that they become vehicles of criticism of male disciples (Peter, James, John) as well as female. Perhaps I would see what is happening in Luke/Acts as criticism of women leaders in the church in your Lucan situation, and criticism of men (Peter) in the church in Acts; both are perhaps related to the question of people who want - need - to act as servants, in contrast to or in control of those who want to emphasize preaching and praying. Note Luke's apparent approval of the ladies in Luke 8:3; your hermeneutics might note Peter appointing men over the problem of widows (or just say "natural"). The real use of your hermeneutics of suspicion should be focussed on Luke's like of preachers (as Jesus in Luke, Peter in Acts) and listeners (as Mary and the people in Acts). The question is how can you use the hermeneutics of suspicion in a positive way for both men and women to work with the gospels when just male/female is not the issue?

Schuessler Fiorenza: You mean in Acts or today? There were no women preaching in Acts. Let me go back again. In my work, I have tried to move the discussion away from texts about women to women as agents in early Christian

history. I have sought to construct the "subtext" of androcentric early Christian texts in terms of a historical model of reconstruction that can read the androcentric New Testament texts about women not just in terms of women, but in terms of structural shifts, shifts in different understandings of community, leadership, and so on. A hermeneutics of suspicion has to trace these.

My historical reconstructive model uses the notion of patriarchy - as it was elaborated in Aristotelian philosophy - as an analytical heuristic concept. This notion of patriarchy defines the New Testament household codes, and with time the structures of the established church. The texts about women and slaves help us to trace this patriarchal development and the struggle against it. I refer to the Acts passage on the "widows of the Hellenists" in order to show that this text divides "logos and diakonia" among men and therefore divides it differently from the Lukan passage. I suggest that we read both passages in terms of the struggles going on in the social-ecclesial context of Acts. When constructing such a "subtext," one has to face, of course, the problem that we don't know where the Lucan work is to be situated geographically. For example, it would be much easier if one could situate Acts in Asia Minor. Then one could clearly situate the story within the context of the ecclesial struggles in Asia Minor which still can be traced in the post-Pauline rhetoric for the patriarchal ordering of Christian household and community.

Since one cannot with certainty situate the Lucan work geographically in Asia Minor, I'm a little more hesitant to draw these lines too definitely. Historically one cannot make definite connections, although one can see patterns of development. In short, I would not want to read the text just in terms of women. I have suggested that we read the Lucan text in terms of a historical, theological argument. At the end of the first century, Mary and Martha, whose names are still known, represent the apostolic women. There were probably more apostolic women about whom we have no knowledge because of the androcentric redaction and canonization process. There is a lot of information that we no longer have.

Donahue: I'd like to pick up on that last point. It seems to me that the historical schemes you developed - as you say, this story represents a stage moving away from the recognition of the active role of women as missionary preachers as are in the pre-Pauline community - it seems to me that it's a scheme of early patriarchalism, substituting for Kaesemann's early Catholicism. So that, just as he saw the charismatic dimension of early Christianity being routinized and developed into early Catholicism, I would see your scheme as a subdivision of that. If that's true, though - and it may not be true - it would seem to me that if Luke constructed this story and if we're to see this story in the same ethos that we find in the Pastorals, the story would have praised Martha. I mean, on a very basic level; if the story is to praise the reintegration of woman into the traditional categories, then why was the technical language of discipleship - "sitting at the feet of" - used? And in that sense Mary is typological of the ministry of the Word, which also appears in Acts 6. The two typologies are there. If the story is constructed out of that social ethos, why does he praise Mary? If Jesus is speaking with the voice of the repressive church of the end of the first century, he's not

repressive enough.

Schuessler Fiorenza: In a certain sense, yes, if the Lucan texts would understand diakonia in terms of housework and traditional women's work; but this is not indicated. True, one always encounters this interpretation, whether one reads commentaries or hears sermons, or has classes role-play the story - one always will assume that Martha is in the kitchen. However, there is nothing in the text about the kitchen and traditional housework. That is all projected into the text from our own middle-class frame of reference, because that's what women do - they are in the kitchen and do the housework. Although the text does not say that Martha is in the kitchen doing the housework, such an interpretation is presently favored because Mary (and Christian women's discipleship) gets off better.

However, if one reads the story in reference to the Pastorals' restricting women's leadership, specifically, for example, widow's leadership, then Martha casts a quite different figure. Martha functions as a prescriptive example for women in ministerial leadership, not to be worried so much about the diakonein or ministry. The figure of Mary also takes on a quite different function, and the story gives quite a different message. Now I do not want to say that the Lucan text goes as far as the Pastorals go in the prohibition and curtailing of women's leadership. I only suggest that the Lucan text moves in their direction but does not end up where they do. The key is that Luke does not see Martha in terms of traditional housework.

Donahue: Except that when you make the connection with Acts 6, the food distribution, you see that in a more social kind of context.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes, but if you look at Acts, diakonia is understood also in terms of Eucharist.

Donahue: Acts 6?

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes.

Donahue: I'm not too sure. Serving table?

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes, sure.

Donahue: I thought that the dispute was that the widows of the Hellenists were neglected in the daily distribution.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Exegetes generally believe that these poor widows didn't get enough to eat. But if one looks carefully at the text, it could very likely reflect a debate on whether or not the "widows" were actively participating in the service at the Eucharist. There is nothing said about having enough to eat.

Schneiders: This is a kind of methodological expansion. I got interested in the Martha and Mary stories a long time ago. You've got at least four accounts of this event, possibly five if you take into account the woman who comes in to weep at Jesus's feet; possibly, even a sixth version in the floating episode in

John of the woman taken in adultery. There is a similarity in all those stories in terms of basic content. There was an article back in the 1950s that suggested that there was a cycle of women's stories that paralleled the cycle of men's stories. You have Peter, James and John; you have Mary Magdalen, Martha, and a floating third, who probably played a parallel function as foundational figures in the early Church. I don't know what you think about that, but when I compare those stories as they occur in the context of each of the gospels, I seem to see the members of the early Church trying to deal with what they could not refute, namely, the centrality in the gospel of that cycle of women's stories. These stories had the traditional names attached to them, particularly that of Mary Magdalen who has the same kind of historical solidity as Peter. I wonder if what we're really watching is the early Church trying to handle the fact of the leadership role of women in the early Church. If you compare Luke and John you find them filled with traditions about women which are as solid and central as the traditions about Peter, James and John. Perhaps the way these stories are bounced around reveals a patriarchal church trying to come to grips with that story or cycle of stories.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I basically agree, but since we have so few stories about women, I would be hesitant in reducing them to a basic single story.

Schneiders: I say a cycle of stories, a set of stories about women that got concentrated in the same way as the Peter stories. Everything about the cycle gets assigned to disciples whose names we end up knowing.

Schuessler Fiorenza: In terms of form criticism, I would agree with that. You can see such a dynamic in the so-called apocryphal gospels with respect to Mary of Magdala where the debate between Peter and Mary clearly articulates a discussion about women's leadership in the early Church and, in particular, reflects the debate about women receiving and proclaiming revelation. I would agree with you methodologically, that is really what's happening. However, I have read the Fourth Gospel text in this respect solely in terms of the hermeneutics of reconstruction in order to show that another kind of historical theological understanding is expressed in it with the figures of Martha and Mary.

If I had been interested in interpreting the Johannine texts on their own, then I would have had to analyze them in terms of the same process of a critical feminist reading as I have done with the Lucan text. If this had been the objective, then, of course, I would have had to look at the Johannine text also in terms of the hermeneutics of suspicion in order to lay open the narrative dynamics and interest of the Fourth Gospel. As Professor Wire has pointed out, the patriarchal pressures are different in different communities, whether one looks at them in terms of the Fourth Gospel community as being a minority, or in terms of the Lucan work that is more concerned in apologetic defense in the Greco-Roman political-religious context. Antoinette, would you want to say more about that?

Wire: I agree with that. I think it's difficult to deal with the whole series of stories, but it is interesting how they've become linked. One almost wonders if it's partly again because of the transmission of the story. If it's becoming a male transmission, then women all start looking alike. So some of

the stories can begin to melt together for that reason along with other reasons.

Wuellner: But the men come to look alike, too.

Schneiders: That's precisely the point I'm trying to make. You have a cycle of stories about male disciples that gets attached to Peter, and you have a cycle of stories about women disciples that get attached primarily to Mary Magdalene, and to various other women including Martha who stands out rather strongly a couple of times. The authors want to present discipleship in male terms, but they're stuck with a tradition that is firmly lodged in the Christian imagination and in genuine historical recollection.

Schuessler Fiorenza: What I would want to add here is that it is not just a tradition, it's a communal praxis which they have to deal with.

Schneiders: That's my methodological question. By looking at it in the context of each of the gospels, do we get a picture of how different Christian communities were trying to deal with a historically incontrovertible fact both in terms of praxis and in terms of the emerging image of discipleship. If you line the various texts up side by side, you can see a kind of history of interpretation of both praxis and remembered history.

Schussler Fiorenza: Right, that's why I placed the gospels at the end of my book In Memory of Her, in order to counteract the downhill model of historical theological interpretation which says that in the beginning there was a discipleship of equals, and then everything went downhill and very quickly became patriarchalized. I tried to avoid such a misreading of the book by placing the gospels of Mark and John at the end, since they are dated around the time of Colossians and the Pastorals and represent two different accounts of the Jesus traditions. These gospels also seek to come to terms with their own situation by redactionally retelling the traditional stories of the apostolic women. But these gospels still do it in a different way than the post-Pauline tradition does, and at the turn of the first century a lot of other traditions probably still existed about which we don't have any knowledge.

Maldonado: I would like to follow up on Sandra's question a little bit in terms of your methodology of androcentric inclusive language and feminist specific in terms of proper name, in that when men are talked about, women are supposedly included, but that when women are talked about in a specific situation, the problem needs to be addressed. It seems that there's a slightly different thing going on when proper names are mentioned. For example, when Peter is mentioned, I still have to stop and think if I am included in this precisely because it's Peter that is mentioned and not just any man. My question is, if Mary and Martha do refer to some historical groups or traditions in an analogous way to Peter and the Beloved Disciple, how do we interact with those stories if there are no Peter and Beloved Disciple groups continuing on into our era? Do we try to find what the analogous dynamics would be between various leaderships, or is there something already about the proper name groups that forces everyone to ask where we fit into this - into the interaction of the story?

Schuessler Fiorenza: This is what I have tried to show by looking at the history of interpretation. What is happening in the process of reading is that whenever the woman figures become principles, types, or ideals, then they can function for everybody. Whenever they are seen as women, interpreters understand them in terms of what we expect women to be, or women to do. In the act of interpretation, we read texts always through our androcentric lenses and cultural stereotypes. Coming from a tradition for which Peter is the foundation of the church, a Roman Catholic woman, for example, can read the texts about Peter in an inclusive sense, and not only as a male paradigm. Exegetes have usually done so, except when they discuss the texts in terms of the contemporary ecclesiastical papal office. In contrast, if one looks at the interpretations of the Mary Magdalen passages, one will find that she is always seen as a woman in terms of cultural feminine stereotypes.

Therefore, I have argued in terms of method that if one takes seriously the dynamics of androcentric language, one must read androcentric texts as inclusive of women unless proven otherwise. I mean by this maxim that if one has clear indications that a woman is excluded, then one can't read her into the text. But we usually argue the other way around. One still has to prove that women are there, rather than the other way around, to prove that women are not there.

Maldonado: I guess my question is not so much in terms of that but in terms of when Mary Magdalen or Martha is associated with a story - if there were these cycles of stories - then could they be traced back to the cycles of Mary Magdalen or Christian movements that identified with her as a figure? Whereas, if it had just been two women in the story, it seems as if that would change the dynamics of the story - not just replacing it with men, but replacing it with unknown women. The story could still operate on a lot of the same levels, but in terms of historical reconstruction, we wouldn't posit that there are any rival groups, particularly men/women or women/women.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I could not have reconstructed my historical subtext in the same fashion if there were no names in the Lucan story, and if, for example, the Johannine text in which Martha has a different role and function were no longer available. That's why I could argue that the story could be read within the discussion of early Christianity where certain communities may have appealed to the apostolic women. We know that not only women appealed to these women, but whole segments of the church as, for example, so-called gnostic groups have legitimated their praxis with reference to Mary of Magdala and prophetic circles with reference to the apostolic women prophets.

Knapp: At the risk of short circuiting what has been a very interesting discussion of exegetical questions about which I know nothing at all, I'd like to ask at least one question about having one's cake and eating it too, or, as it seems to me, not having one's cake and not eating it too. I framed it somewhat negatively in my response to your paper, and I'd like to turn it around and just ask it more positively. Why doesn't the reconstructed history of women's experience as reflected in this distorted way in the biblical texts count for you, itself, as theological authority? Why, having reconstructed the history, doesn't one just make what would seem the obvious next move and say, that is the canon within the canon, even though it's outside the canon,

nevertheless, that's the canonical authority. Why do you, having done that, make the further point that theological authority has to be located in women's experience in the present? And that's not a rhetorical question.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I understand. In responding to your point, I would suggest it might be helpful to distinguish between norm and authority. Canon means norm. If the canonical books are androcentric books written and selected in a patriarchal culture, then they cannot be, as such, norm for feminist Christians but must be assessed critically in terms of criteria for liberation. Such norms or criteria must be derived from a systemic analysis of the experience of women and men struggling to end patriarchal oppression.

Christian churches actually have always done the same, as one respondent has commented. That's nothing new; everybody always does it anyway. But churchmen and theologians proceed in the same vein without ever articulating their procedure in such a way; churchmen and theologians always will say, "It's God's will in the Bible," or "Jesus has said so, and therefore, we must use the same norm." Just recall, for instance, the biblical arguments against the ordination of women or against homosexuality. Therefore, I have insisted that we must make explicit that it is we, not God, who articulate today what is normative in the bible and what is not. We have to take the responsibility for articulating the norms or the canon as well as for the reconstruction of the tradition.

Having taken such responsibility, we can go back and reconstruct, or re-read, the text. And, of course, if we are able to reconnect our criteria and are able to find texts that can be a resource in the liberation struggle, then they have some kind of authority. This is not the authority of norm, but an enabling, empowering authority. It's a recasting of authority, not in terms of norm to be obeyed - which would perpetuate the patriarchal submission pattern - but authority experienced as resource, enablement and empowerment in the struggle.

Knapp: I think it was, in fact, I who made the suggestion that no one ever really applied what I think you are calling a priori past norms, because the ultimate source of authority always had to be present in the present. But I was suggesting that there was a way, nevertheless, in which traditional theologians thought of the Bible having authority, namely, because it was the Word of God, and they thought of God as being effective in the present and in the past. So that, logically, authority always derives from the present, but that's because God is still the same God, active in the present as in the past. I was suggesting that it was only if you suspended the question of divine agency that we could think of the Bible ever having functioned as an a priori past norm. Nevertheless, I guess the question I'm raising now is where the authority lies. I guess what's puzzling me about this is that since it's not as if you're rejecting theological authority all together, then the question is why is there only a derivative authority through this projection from the present into these texts from the past where we, then, see reflected images which we can use rhetorically in our present situations? Why wouldn't you want to argue that, just as in the present, women's experience is theologically authoritative - I take it you mean that there's some sort of divine activity going on there. Why wouldn't the fact that that divine activity was also going

on in the past mean that the past reconstructed history counts as an independent theological authority, apart from our interpretation of it in the present?

Schuessler Fiorenza: But this authority is not independent of our articulation and responsibility; it's within the hermeneutical circle.

Knapp: It's not available independently...

Schuessler Fiorenza: We are starting here, and we have the end point here and it's not independent, but our experience of God's liberating activity in and through our struggles is outside this hermeneutical circle.

Knapp: Well, is it merely projected, if it's not independent?

Schuessler Fiorenza: Reconstruction is not projection. My point is exactly that it is apologetics that tries to project a positive essence or history back into biblical texts. It is precisely the task of historical reconstruction to test out such projections; it is not just the projection behind authority, or the projection behind liberation. For the liberating struggle which is my criterion, it is important to test out which texts are articulated for patriarchal purposes and therefore have functioned as oppressive texts, justifying and sustaining patriarchal oppression. It is as important to reconstruct the patriarchal use and interpretation of androcentric texts as it is to identify those texts which represent counter-voices and visions and might be able to give liberating vision, courage, hope in liberation struggles today.

Knapp: Then you don't want to call that latter category the canon within the canon?

Schuessler Fiorenza: No, because it is not fixed, it cannot be applied or used as a principle or a rule. It is not a norm to be obeyed; it is not a canon to be observed.

Pfeiffer: I'm not a theologian, so I'm bringing in methodological concerns, which is a stale matter; methodology always comes around when the fruitful work is done. What interests me is what you have to say to that. You started repeating your distinction between a hermeneutics of consent or acceptance and a hermeneutics of suspicion. Now this distinction, somehow, resembles, but at the same time, it cuts across a distinction that was made repeatedly in that notorious debate in the late sixties and early seventies between traditional ("ontological," etc.) and "critical" hermeneutics. On the one hand, Gadamer held that hermeneutics always means application. It is never simply reconstruction; it is always an application to our present situation. But that very same Gadamer was adamantly opposed to the efforts of the Frankfurt group to turn that kind of application into a systematic criticism of ideology, for instance. And if you look at the history of that debate, it seems to me that, in the long run, the pendulum swung back to Gadamer, so to speak, the Frankfurt group and the concern of social emancipation was more and more diluted. So my question would be the following. There are cases, and I think your case would be one, wherever you take your stand concerning this very blurred distinction between application and criticism, there clearly are cases in which such a

criticism is necessary. But that, then, would be a motivation in terms not of methodology in general, but it would be a motivation in terms of topicality, because there seems to be a very topical case for criticism like yours. You can go about it without being too much concerned with methodology as such. Will you then say that perhaps - and this I think is the interesting case deriving from your identification between the aesthetics and the ethics of a text - there are possible degrees of topicality which you could not solve with your approach, identifying aesthetics and ethics?

Schuessler Fiorenza: I did not formulate that maxim, I took it over from Wayne Booth. I am not concerned here with aesthetics but with ethics and theological claims. I do not want to argue the aesthetic point, but I would question the statement that Gadamer has won the debate against the Frankfurt school.

Pfeiffer: But that's structurally equivalent, I think.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I'm not so sure of that.

Pfeiffer: Well, let me add a second question. The topic of, say, a macho prejudice in the varieties of Christian religion is, outside the church to my knowledge, a very current one. There is a lot of criticism of this bias in the Christian church. Apparently there was a Council once, at Macon if I am not mistaken, around 600, in which the men there debated the question of whether women were human beings. So I think it's easy to criticize the church from that perspective, and I would be interested in knowing how you would relate your form of feminist criticism to this more general perspective or criticism of the male prejudice in Christianity which, I think, has been going on for some time outside the church.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Obviously, I'm not doing my work just in the context of academic theology, but also in the context of Feminist Studies which have been developed especially in this country. Feminist Studies critically analyze all areas of the academy and seek to reconstruct all academic disciplines. From the outset, therefore, Feminist Studies have been interdisciplinary. Feminist Studies in religion and feminist theology have started with the critical analysis and deconstruction of the sexist aspects of tradition, theology and church, just as Feminist Studies in general have indicted the patriarchal structures of Western culture and society which Christianity has legitimated. Although one cannot insist enough that this critical moment must never be relinquished, Feminist Studies have moved beyond it to critical construction in terms of women's history. But they also have sought to articulate theoretical frameworks which do not either place women on the periphery or make women the mere objects of male discourse. Rather such feminist theory seeks to articulate feminist method and conceptual frameworks in such a way that women's questions and women's issues and, therefore, women's challenge of patriarchy and androcentrism, can become central for the academy and church.

Such a feminist critical theory and practice, of course, implies a paradigm shift which has been initiated but is far from being accomplished because such a paradigm shift requires a change of power relationships in the scientific community. Such a shift is not simply a question of new theory, but also a question of changing the power relationships in the academic community.

I am sure that you are aware of Bernstein's work; he has surveyed the hermeneutical discussion in the context of the American situation, and points to emancipatory communities in order to overcome the object/subject split and relativity/truth problem. But he falls short when it comes to concrete identification of such emancipatory communities. I have elaborated that feminist theology like other liberation theologies has the advantage of being able to name both the subjects and the emancipatory communities of their critical discourses.

Wuellner: I'd like to come at your model from another angle that I first learned from Edwin Judge.² Instead of focusing singularly on patriarchy and androcentrism - the key terms in your own discourse - Judge makes me see the meeting in Martha's house as a signal for matriarchy and matronage system. Luke here, as Paul before him, acknowledges the fact that early Christians put up with patronage, that is, invitations were acceptable to a patron's or matron's house, or to be "received" there (compare Lk 9:53 with 10:38). When, however, the patron (or matron in this case, hence the sexual difference is not the key, but a certain social system, irrespective of who is at the top, man or woman) would be trying to throw his or her weight around in the Christian setting, as Martha does by saying to Jesus, can't you make Mary do something, then, according to Judge, Christianity brings a twist to the acceptance of the patronage/matronage system by challenging the status system that goes with it. This model would be another way of opening up an access to this text. We would not need to get into androcentrism, and all the alleged male/female dynamics. Instead we would get into a larger social systems issue. Not hospitality, but the patronage system: that's the case in Martha's house - and I wonder, by the way, what would have happened if Martha had sat at Jesus's feet as the matron of that house; that would be a completely different story, wouldn't it? What Martha is in Lk 10, what Phoebe is in Romans 16 and Lydia in Acts 16:15, and perhaps Cloe in 1 Corinthians 1:11.

Schuessler Fiorenza: That was my point before, that Martha's diakonia is that of the owner of the house and the leader of a house church. Her Christian leadership functions may have been intertwined with Greco-Roman patronage functions. Murphy O'Connor raised this objection against my notion of a discipleship of equals in a review of In Memory of Her. However, this objection overlooks the fact that a patriarchal status system functions differently for women than for men. Feminists call this difference "gender asymmetry." In In Memory of Her, I have sought to articulate a model for the reconstruction of early Christianity that could do justice not only to the different status locations of freeborn and slave women and men but also to that of freeborn men and women. I have been a member of the SBL Social World Studies Group from its very beginnings. Because of my awareness of feminist theoretical work in history, anthropology and social science, I kept insisting that biblical exegetes should avoid - as they often have not done previously with respect to uncritically adopted philosophical metaphysical frameworks and categories for historical interpretation - uncritical importations of social or sociological frameworks without critically analyzing their ideological implications.

Since Gerd Theissen and other scholars have adopted the Weberian notion of patriarchy as a key concept for their historical reconstruction of early

Christianity, I argued that this key concept deserves a critical discussion. I mean, I didn't introduce this notion into the discussion of early Christianity, other scholars introduced it as a theoretical interpretative category. Therefore, I proposed to do a paper in order to look critically at such a key concept. Instead, I was invited to do a paper on the Book of Revelation. As a friend suggested, this is one of the reasons why I had to write In Memory of Her.

If instead of reconstructing women's leadership in early Christianity over and against either Jewish or Greek or Roman or Asian women we see their leadership in the light of dominant Greco-Roman patriarchy, we will be able to understand that even freeborn and wealthy women's access to leadership as that of a submerged group is different from that of men. Early Christian women could exercise leadership because during Hellenism and the early Empire women (including Jewish women) had gained some economic independence, public influence, and social status.

Wuellner: But that is, again, speaking of women generically, isn't it? I'm addressing the issue of the interpretive model given in Martha as householder in a patronage/matronage social system and the status indigenous to that system.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes, her apostolic ministry is portrayed in terms of householder. For economic reasons, she had some influence.

Wuellner: And status.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Correct - and status. That's right. But in order to understand why Luke emphasizes this, one needs to look at the Pastorals where the argument is not against the status of local male ministers, not against the status of male householders, but is directed against the ministry of wealthy women householders. What we can observe in the theological rhetoric advocating adaptation to the dominant patriarchal Greco-Roman culture is that those women who have leadership status because of prophecy or spiritual gifts as well as those women who have status because of economic or other social reasons are pushed back again or eliminated from leadership altogether. Social status functions differently for women than for men.

Schneiders: This is the question when you put a hermeneutics of suspicion on the one side, and a hermeneutics of consent or sympathy on the other side. I keep trying to flush this through my own experience in interpreting texts. I think as women we always have to begin in regard to classical texts with the hermeneutics of suspicion. But at the same time, isn't there a kind of hermeneutics of sympathy or hermeneutics of consent that is operative in the very fact that we're suspicious of the text? Unless we had a vested interest in the text, our level of suspicion would not be as high as it is. It's precisely because of the damage that this text can do to our self-understanding, to our participation in the Christian community, to our humanity, that our level of suspicion is so high - and rightly so. I keep trying to separate them out, and maybe it's the little Gadamer in me saying that it's our participation in the tradition that raises the level of suspicion to such a pitch. So isn't there a sympathy, a kind of consent, that unleashes

the suspicion itself?

Schuessler Fiorenza: My point was that our sympathy or, I would say, solidarity is with the women and men who throughout Christian history and still today are struggling and insisting that they are ecclesial subjects, and not just objects of patriarchal control. Insofar as this is the case, a hermeneutics of suspicion is sparked by a "hermeneutics" of solidarity and struggle. But I would suggest that "hermeneutics" is here somewhat a misnomer, since our sympathy and solidarity is with the people rather than with androcentric biblical texts or patriarchal Christian traditions in which women could not participate as subjects.

Schneiders: And yet if we didn't have such a vested interest in the text, we would do something more useful.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Only insofar as we understand ourselves as ecclesial subjects will we be interested not only in a hermeneutics of suspicion but also in a hermeneutics of reconstruction in the interest of women's and men's liberation struggle in church and society. Insofar as we are members of Western culture which has been and still is shaped by biblical values and rhetoric, feminists must be interested for political cultural reasons in a hermeneutics of suspicion that deconstructs the public authority claims of patriarchal biblical rhetorics. Whereas all feminists share in a hermeneutics of suspicion, the other steps in my hermeneutical model are only of interest to those who are committed to a non-patriarchal future of Christian faith and church. I'm working with those people who have a stake in such a present and future, but I have no interest in the apologetic enterprise. A process of critical feminist biblical interpretation is, however, not only of significance to biblical feminists but seeks to assist all women by articulating a critical evaluation of the function of biblical rhetoric in the political struggle.

Schneiders: I wanted to add one more thing, too, on the question that Bob was raising about the generic male and the non-generic female. One of the things that I've noticed in my own work on John's gospel is that when a woman is the subject of a story, the tendency of commentators is to individualize and privatize it immediately. I think particularly of the story of the Samaritan woman. There is a standard kind of phrase for the call of an apostle: he left his nets, he left his boat, he left his father, he left his tax stall, and immediately... Then we hear that the Samaritan woman left her water pot, and immediately went... but somehow the audial memory doesn't function. This becomes the private story of an individual woman. Is it the fact that the subject of the story is a woman that simply "de-apostolizes" that story? I think we have seen the same thing in interpretations of the Mary Magdalen story in the 20th chapter of John. What is clearly an apostolic commission becomes a private appearance because the subject is a woman. It works exactly the opposite way if the subject is a man. Even if the man is not named, his story becomes a generic story that is for the edification of all the faithful.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Yes, this is my point.

Waetjen: I'm struggling with a hermeneutical circle that I'm not sure I can break out of, and I wonder how you do that. If the history of the

interpretation of Luke-Acts or of any biblical text has been androcentric and patriarchal, how do you differentiate between the interpretations of those texts and the application that the original writer wanted to communicate on the basis of what he had written. How do you know your hermeneutics of suspicion is not concentrating entirely on what you have derived from the history of interpretation? Is it not possible that the writer, even though he may be a male, is not necessarily androcentric and patriarchal?

Schuessler Fiorenza: I make the distinction between androcentric and patriarchal. All texts are androcentric by the mere fact that they are written in a grammatically masculine language structure. Not all texts, however, are patriarchal. All texts written in a grammatical masculine language such as, for instance, Greek, Hebrew, English or German, are by definition androcentric and it does not matter who wrote the text, a man or a woman. Naturally, women also can write patriarchal texts since women as well as men are socialized into a patriarchal culture.

This distinction between androcentric and patriarchal text allows me to question Mary Daly's and other feminist's contention that the Bible is patriarchal. The Bible, just as all other documents written in Western language, is androcentric but its writings do not eo ipso advocate patriarchal values, visions, and structures. Such a distinction demands a process of critical assessment, not only in terms of historical reconstruction but also in terms of theological construction. But such critical assessment and construction is always part and parcel of theological work not just part of feminist theological work.

One of my colleagues taught a course comparing Bultmann's theology of the New Testament with that of In Memory of Her, and she told me that many students pointed out that I have so many footnotes whereas Bultmann wrote his theology, considered to be the standard, classic work, without much documentation and discussion of other positions. She explained that dominant scholarship is always accepted while minority scholarship has to "prove itself" in terms of the majority. In light of this insight, I would suggest that we need to be more concerned about the integrity and quality of dominant male scholarship and its projection of dominant interests into the text because feminists and all these people on the periphery of the academy seek to be as careful as possible in order to avoid such liability.

If one just looks at the standard interpretation of the New Testament stories about women, one recognizes that established historical critical scholarship - although it claims to be scientific and objective exegesis - has not avoided projecting all kinds of feminine stereotypes on the women in the stories. One can look at commentary after commentary and one will find this confirmed. And it's not because of ill will or because all exegetes have hated women or were intent on perpetrating prejudice, but rather because such stereotypes have been unconscious.

Duke: I found your exegesis unfailingly illuminating to me, and exciting. I'm not an exegete, as you know, so I'd like to turn this question, once again, back to the theoretical realm and to the question of hermeneutics of suspicion, and having one's cake and eating it too, and matters like that. The issue has

to do with the principle that one's ethics before one reads the text always determines one's reading of it. As I gather from the methodological conclusion of your paper, there is a hermeneutical circle in the vicious sense; that is to say, that one is going to judge by one's prior ethical decision as to both the meaning and especially the authority of whatever text one reads. I wonder, then, how one can ever learn anything ethically from a text. Is it possible that androcentric and sexist individuals might read some text, any text including your own, and be transformed by them in some way because there is an over-againstness or compelling character about those texts that does not allow these people any longer to rest comfortably with their own prior ethical stance?

Schuessler Fiorenza: Prior ethical stances are usually not deliberate decisions, and conscious standpoints, but internalized socializations. My point is that they must be made conscious if an adequate reading of a text is to be made possible. Moreover, if the inherent ethical theological tendencies of texts are not critically evaluated in the process of reading, patriarchal texts - especially sacred texts - will serve to inculcate patriarchal values and patterns as the will of God. I agree with you that biblical texts can also challenge our prior ethical stances, but they are not likely to do so, for instance, in the case of an abused woman who believes in the Bible. Patriarchal biblical texts used for counseling a battered wife to suffer her marital abuse as Christ did may totally undermine such a woman's fragile will to self-preservation and self-respect. Just as doctors must know about the effects of their procedures and medicines, so theological interpreters and biblical ministers need to be skilled, not only in understanding the meaning of a text in its historical literary context, but also in assessing and critically evaluating its impact in their own social political ecclesial contexts.

Since we all have internalized our privileged or secondary status in and through socialization, liberation theologies insist that such internalized values and stances must be articulated and changed in the process of conscientization. Or in theological terms, a hermeneutics of critical evaluation must be rooted in a hermeneutics of conversion - as one response puts it - in an experience which breaks through the dominant internalized patriarchal frameworks and mindsets. Only then will one be able to question the ideological super-structures. Those who are on the periphery or those who are oppressed see power relations and raise critical questions which those who belong to the dominant group are not able to perceive.

For example, this semester I taught a seminar on New Testament and Ethics with my colleague, Katie Cannon, who is an ethicist. Katie raised questions on the basis of her own experience as a black woman from the South - questions that I never could have raised. She pointed out racist bias in biblical texts and interpretations which I had never seen before. But because of her raising these questions, I and the whole seminar were challenged to make them our own questions when reading biblical texts. Black writers and theologians enable us to question whatever racism we have internalized, to correct our biased perspective and then to ask new questions in the process of interpretation. I realize that there are people who are intentional racists or deliberate misogynists, but I would venture to say that the majority of theologians are not conscious that they have internalized the dominant patriarchal mindset and,

therefore, read biblical texts in terms of such a mindset - and exegetes are no exception.

However, only if one has made a critical systematic analysis of one's prior ethical stance and societal internalizations can one assess whether and how much a text is ethically offensive and fosters oppression. For example, I did a book in 1962 on ministries of women in the Church. At the time, the so-called "theology of woman" was very dominant in the German Roman Catholic context. This theology insisted that the essential vocation of woman was biological or spiritual motherhood. The vocation of woman, the fulfillment of her nature, was to participate in culture and church "under the veil." I absolutely did not agree with this theology because it did not correspond with my own experience and self-understanding.

However, when researching the book, I was not able to deconstruct this theology because I lacked an adequate systematic analysis, since not only theological but also anthropological, psychological and sociological research published in the early sixties propagated the same feminine role and nature. I couldn't find scholarly "authorities" to quote for corroborating my own experience, self-understanding and theological perspective. Only after the women's movement and feminist studies gained momentum was I able to articulate a systematic theological analysis and to understand myself as a theological subject. If I hadn't come to the States, but stayed in Germany, it probably would have taken me much longer to do so because in the States the women's movement, especially within the church, was much stronger than it was in the early seventies in Germany.

Duke: That's helpful. I certainly agree that the pre-understandings we bring to the text are rarely, if ever, deliberate and conscious decisions. I certainly agree, as well, that a hermeneutics of suspicion is in order. It seems to me that there have been a variety of suspicions, and that which you have brought from a feminist perspective is precisely what I was referring to as something that, for me, has been so illuminating and exciting. The difficulty I have with that still, though, is that the end, as a statement of hermeneutical theory, seems to be - you referred to experience - that one learns ethically, or is converted ethically by something other, always, than reading text. Reading a text can never be that occasion.

Schuessler Fiorenza: Not necessarily. What was important for me was the theoretical framework and analysis, which I did not have before. Only such a systematic analysis made it possible for me to articulate my own self-understanding as a woman, to become a theological subject and to develop a theoretical theological critique of the feminine theological stereotype that still informs dominant exegesis and church ministry. I could not challenge the over-all theological, or sociological, theoretical framework because my different self-understanding was based on experience, but it was a particularized, individual kind of experience. Only when a theoretical analysis and a different theoretical framework became available was I able to make the connections between my self-understanding as a woman Christian and my theoretical theological work.

Duke: I understand that biographically, but I cannot understand it as a

hermeneutical principle.

Schuessler Fiorenza: But I did not intend to outline a biographical moment but a hermeneutical one.

Duke: Hermeneutically, obviously, our experiences may do that, and do just that. The question is whether the hermeneutical experience with the text may do that - including a text like yours. Thus sexist males, for example, reading your text, not because of an experience outside of that text but because of their experience with that text, are ethically reformed. Or is the text always totally the victim of one's pre-understanding? My question is, where does the gain come in this hermeneutical circle?

Schuessler Fiorenza: If the text were totally the victim of our pre-understanding, then a critical hermeneutical evaluation wouldn't be necessary. One does not need to test out different texts and interpretations as to how much they provide visions of liberation and how much they communicate, perpetuate and legitimate patriarchal oppression, if texts do not have a power of their own. But the image of the hermeneutical circle is misleading. The text is not the personified opposite of the reader. Texts have communicative functions between people.

Whereas exegetes and theologians are very concerned with the "rights" of the biblical text, or worry about its possible "victimization," I would argue that we as exegetes and theologians ought to critically assess and evaluate sacred texts in order to protect the "rights" of people and to end their victimization under patriarchy. That's why I make a distinction between androcentric texts and patriarchal oppression. Androcentric texts can communicate liberating visions and challenges, but one has to look twice at them in order to understand whether they do so, or whether they perpetuate patriarchal mindsets and prejudices.

Schneiders: I want to add another thing to that analysis. The texts are androcentric simply because the language is; they are patriarchal in terms of ideology; but when you talk about sexism, I think you are talking about the ideology of patriarchy which has been made conscious, and then affirmed as a personalized stance. So I would say sexist readers probably could not be converted because they have already made a judgement about the kind of criticism they are doing, whereas someone who is simply patriarchal, that is, the subject of a kind of subconscious ideology, could well be confronted by that kind of analysis, and have his or her patriarchal ideology challenged precisely because it is not conscious. So I would say that sexism is a stage beyond patriarchy in the sense that patriarchal ideology has become conscious and then has been affirmed as a deliberately chosen stance.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I have defined these categories differently. I understand androcentrism or androcentric dualism as cultural ideological mindset, patriarchy as a societal pyramidal system of interstructured discriminations and oppressions that consist of sexism, racism, classism, and militaristic imperialism. In distinction to much feminist literature, I do not understand patriarchy as the domination of all men over all women. Feminism in turn is the commitment and movement to end patriarchy and its ideological

internalizations and legitimizations.

Schneiders: I would include sexism, racism, colonialism, and so on, in patriarchal ideology. But the person who has his or her racist ideology made conscious and then says, "This is the way I choose to be," is the person I would then call racist.

Schuessler Fiorenza: I agree, but I would understand such a person to be a racist not just in terms of ideology and consciousness but also in terms of patriarchal power and collaboration. In my understanding, patriarchy is not only an ideological system but also a societal system that engenders dehumanizing ideologies and in turn is legitimated by them.

Waetjen: This concludes the formal part of the colloquy. Thank you very much for being here this evening.

NOTES

1. Wilhelm H. Wuellner and Robert C. Leslie, The Surprising Gospel (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 105-112.
2. For a review of E. A. Judge's contribution to the study of various social and cultural "systems" as they apply to Paul, but equally to Luke, see my notes (nn. 105-108) to "Paul as Pastor," in L'Apôtre Paul. A. Vanhoye, ed., BETL, 73 (Leuven University Press, 1986), 49-77.

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